

Sister Annella, OSB

Apostle of Suffering in our Day

A Life Sketch



by

REV. JOSEPH KREUTER, O. S. B.

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IMPRIMI POTESST:

† ALCUINUS, O. S. B.

Abbas S. Joannis Bapt.

IMPRIMATUR:

† JOSEPHUS CHARTRAND

Episcopus Indianapolitanus

Sept. 6, 1929

DECLARATION

In conformity with the decree of Pope Urban VIII and the definitions of other Popes, the author hereby declares that the statements contained in this Life Sketch are based solely on human authority for their trustworthiness.

The Author

FOREWORD

In the Book of Wisdom we read that "venerable old age is not that of a long time, nor counted by the number of years." The truth of this saying of Scripture seems to have been verified in no small measure in the life of Sister M. Annella Zervas, O. S. B., the span of whose earthly existence numbered only one score years and six, eleven of which she spent in the special service of her Divine Master. Like the "passion flower," which grows to maturity and bursts into full bloom in the warm rays of the glad sunshine, Sister Annella developed under the benign influence of the Holy Rule of St. Benedict, whose spiritual daughter she was. In her longing for conformity with the Divine Model, she did not hesitate to carry out the injunction of the Savior (Luke 9:23): "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up *his* cross daily and follow me."

As numerous requests have been made for the edifying account of the sufferings and death of Sister Annella, the following sketch, which appeared originally in "The Grail," (July, 1928), it is now reprinted in pamphlet form.

May this brief narrative of a chosen soul be a source of edification to all who read it, and may the noble example of a fellow mortal encourage them likewise to take up their cross each day, and spur them on to bear patiently and with resignation to the holy will of God the sufferings, adversities, and other crosses that may fall to their lot.

FEAST OF THE PURIFICATION, 1931.

St. Meinrad, Indiana.

BENEDICT BROWN, O. S. B.

Editor of *The Grail*.

An Apostle of Suffering in Our Day

EARLY YEARS

“**Y**ES, Lord, send me more pain, but give me strength to bear it,” is the prayer that was repeatedly uttered by Sister Annella in the midst of excruciating pains of body and anguish of soul which lasted almost continually for two long years. Perfectly resigned to God’s Holy Will, the sufferer lay on her bed of agony, serene of mind, frequently even chanting hymns in praise of God. Indeed, it required superhuman strength to bear the tortures of a most loathsome disease, which made her body a living prey to corruption, to keep cheerful and clear in mind under the most severe mental strain. Sister Annella may justly be called an apostle of suffering. An account of her marvelous patience and abandonment to God’s Holy Will must prove a source of inspiration and consolation to all that tread life’s narrow path. Here was a soul that knew what it meant to love the Cross; not only the image of the Crucified, but the cross of helpless confinement to a bed of pain. Yes, there are still souls left, even in our age of ease and pleasure-seeking, that are willing to carry their cross patiently, yes, cheerfully, no matter how heavy it may be. Sister Annella was one of these.

Her favorite poem, “Rabboni,” reflects the sublime sentiments of her soul:

When I am dying,
How glad I shall be
That the lamp of my life
Has been burned out for Thee;
That sorrow has darkened
The pathway I trod;
That thorns, not roses,
Were strewn o’er the sod;

That anguish of spirit
Full often was mine,
Since anguish of spirit
So often was Thine,
My cherished Rabboni!
How glad I shall be
To die with the hope
Of a welcome from Thee. Amen.

Sister M. Annella Zervas, O. S. B., was born at Moorhead, Minnesota, April 7, 1900. The excellent training she received from her parents engendered in her tender heart a deep faith and loving trust in God. These virtues proved the mainstay in her agonizing trials and tribulations in later years. Early in life, Anna, this was her baptismal name, showed talent and love for music, which she assiduously set about to cultivate.

In her prayers she was very regular and devout. Obedience, cheerfulness, and kindness seemed to be natural to her. Ever ready to serve others, she would gladly bring sacrifices for them.

In her dress she was plain and modest. At school her behavior and diligence were exemplary.

When the time for her first Holy Communion approached, she took great pains in preparing her soul for it. It was, indeed, a day of intense interior happiness for her. At first she would receive as often as her confessor permitted; later on, she communicated daily.



Anna Zervas at the age of 2½ years

On leaving the parochial school of her home town, Anna attended Sacred Heart Academy at Fargo, N. Dak. During this period she daily walked a mile from her home to attend Holy Mass at the Cathedral of Fargo and to receive Holy

Communion. Then she would partake of a frugal lunch in the vestibule of the church and hurry to school a distance of one mile. Throughout her life she entertained a special devotion to her Eucharistic Lord and Master.

At the age of fifteen Anna expressed a strong desire to consecrate her life to God in religion. With the consent and blessing of her spiritual director, P. Alfred, O. S. B., and her parents, she entered the convent of the Benedictine Sisters at St. Joseph, Minnesota, in August, 1915. Anna had always loved her parents, brothers and sisters very dearly; yet, she brought the sacrifice cheerfully. The words of St. Paul: "What shall separate me

from the love of Christ?" etc., were her guiding star in leaving all for Christ's sake. Severe interior trials had preceded her final decision to consecrate herself unreservedly to God. In a little poem composed by her at this time, entitled: "Christ's Ways of Love," she refers to these trials and thanks the Lord for them.

As an aspirant in the convent, she at once entered whole-heartedly into the spirit of her vocation. The letters which she wrote to her parents reflect the happiness that was hers in the cloister. Repeatedly she expresses her heartfelt thanks to them for permitting her to follow her sublime calling, adding that, if many young people in the world would know of the happiness of the religious life, they would hasten to seek admission to the cloister.

God had many trials in store for this generous soul. In spite of her happiness she began to be harassed by homesickness, which at times grew so strong that she felt tempted to leave the convent. Fervent prayers and will power aided her in remaining faithful to her vocation. Whenever she was home during vacation she felt irresistibly drawn back to the convent.

About this time a new suffering made its appearance. It proved the forerunner of her later inexplicable ailment. A burning pain, which developed in the stomach, remained with her to



Parental home of Sister Annella in Moorhead, Minnesota
The death chamber of Sister Annella is marked with an X

the end of her life. Medical examinations failed to discover a reason for it.

The aspirant made rapid progress in the spiritual life. She profited greatly by the annual retreats. The resolutions which she noted down during the spiritual exercises give ample evidence of this. One of these resolutions reads: "With the grace of God I am determined to become a saint!" We find it repeated in slightly different words in her diary.



Anna Zervas at the age of 8 years

On June 17, 1918, Anna received the Benedictine habit together with the name of Sister Mary Annella. It was a day of great rejoicing of soul for the novice and closer union with her God. The letters which she wrote to her parents during the novitiate are replete with allusions to her spiritual progress and interior happiness.

On July 11, 1919, Sister Annella was admitted to simple profession. In the fall of that year she was appointed music teacher and organist of St. Mary's Parish, Bismarck, N. D.

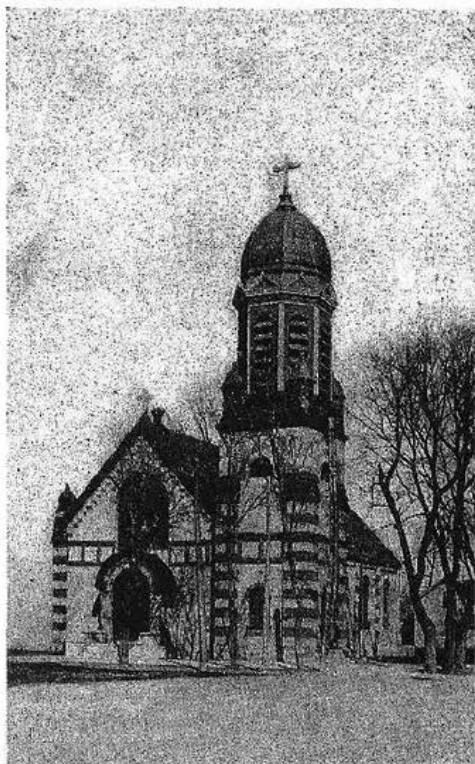
This position afforded her ample opportunity to employ her musical talent in the service of her Eucharistic Lord, whom she loved so ardently. It was a source of delight for her to train the choir in the liturgical chant of the Church. During this time new temptations to abandon her vocation began to trouble her

soul. They grew stronger as the time for her perpetual vows drew nearer. With the help of God, and under the prudent guidance of Rev. J. Slag, her director, she was able to overcome these trials.

In July, 1922, Sister Annella pronounced her perpetual vows. From that day all doubts concerning her vocation had vanished completely. She now would belong irrevocably to God. Her happiness was intense, still enhanced by the thought that two of her sisters, for whom she had offered many prayers, had consecrated their lives to God in the same convent on the same day. Sister Annella had remarked on that occasion: "My next great feast will be when I leave this world." And so it was.

The many physical and mental sufferings which had been Sister Annella's portion ever since she had entered the convent, and which she had borne so patiently, seemed to have been destined to prepare her for the dreadful tortures that were yet in store for her.

About a year after her solemn profession a peculiar skin disease attacked her body. Terrible itching tormented her by day and by night. Every available remedy was tried, but without results. Still she continued her work as music teacher and organist, although it required almost superhuman efforts. Hot



The old St. Joseph's Church in Moorhead, Minn., where Sister Annella received Baptism, Confirmation, and her first Holy Communion. Here is where Sister Annella lay in state on August 15 and 16, 1926

baths in different solutions, lasting from three to five hours, were daily given her. Then she would fall asleep all exhausted; upon awakening, new attacks of pain would follow. The best skin specialists were consulted, but no cause of the ailment could be detected, no remedy was known to them. The condition of the sick sister grew steadily worse. Her body became so contracted, her face so disfigured that her parents at their next visit failed to recognize their own daughter. Yet, Sister Annella never complained of her sufferings, she remained resigned to God's Holy Will, yes, bore her pains cheerfully. No one who saw her would have believed that her soul was overwhelmed with grief, her body racked with pain.

All this was merely leading up to still greater trials that were yet to come. Head, face, hands, and feet began to fester and to bleed. The pains became more intense; the patient's cheerfulness remained the same. Her superiors placed her in care of competent physicians at Mayo's Hospital, Rochester, still hoping to give her some relief. But all efforts to alleviate her pains seemed only to increase them. Finally, the doctors declared the ailment incurable. Sister Annella appeared destined to become an apostle of suffering.

With the consent of her superioress the sick sister was transferred to her parents' home. Her mother, although frail in health herself, was eager to take care of her suffering daughter. This happened during the summer of the year 1924. The heroism of the sufferer was yet to be put to the supreme test.

CHEERFULNESS IN SUFFERING

Sister Annella was in a most pitiable condition, which lasted for two long years. The hearts of those who visited her were moved to compassion at the sight they beheld. It was evident that only superhuman strength could enable the patient to bear those physical and mental tortures with patience and resignation. From six to seven times each day violent attacks of pain came over her weakened frame, her limbs swelled to enormous size, pus and a burning watery substance oozed out of the pores. It was to be feared that she would lose her mind, so violent the pains became at times. Yet, her mind remained as clear and alert as before. Being told that God would bless her for suffer-

ing so heroically, she replied: "It is a blessing that I can suffer this. I could not do it, if God did not give me strength." At another time when it was remarked that some day she would be happy as a reward for her great patience, she said, "I am happy even now in spite of my intense pains."

Her cheerfulness was remarkable. She never showed anxiety about herself, her illness, ways or means to alleviate her sufferings, leaving all in the hands of God, perfectly willing that His designs in her regard be accomplished. She even seemed to be convinced that a cure was out of the question, unless God Himself would take the ailment from her. One day she stated to her mother: "About a year ago I seemed to be almost cured. Then the thought came to me that I might not have borne my pains as patiently as God desired it. So, I went to the chapel and declared to the Lord my willingness to accept the ailment anew, if this were His Holy Will. And the affliction returned with redoubled force." At the same time, Sister Annella was ever ready humbly to submit to any treatment which might give her relief, even though it caused her new pains.

Her disease was making rapid progress; large tumors formed on her neck and face, in her ears and mouth, over the entire body, suppurating constantly; attacks of terrible itching occurred. Her only consolation and source of strength was daily Holy Communion, which she received with great fervor. Her mind continued clear and cheerful. As she lingered on in this marvelous union of pain and peace, her body covered with running sores, her soul serene and uplifted, the beholders could not but compare her to that model of hope and patience, the Patriarch Job. In spite of all her afflictions she would at times do fancy work, ever eager to be occupied and helpful to others.

The devoted mother kept close to her daughter and cheerfully administered to her in every possible way. A painful ailment, which had weakened her considerably, seemed to have vanished completely as soon as she had taken Sister Annella into her care.

Despite the efforts of the mother to soothe and strengthen her daughter's agonizing frame, no relief was found. One day Sister Annella described her sufferings thus: "I feel as if hot steam were blown against my body and I was thrust into a press with such violence that I can barely breathe and as if the blood were

forcing itself out of the pores, but could not get through."

More unbearable even than the bodily pains was the anguish of soul which Sister Annella had to endure—interior trials full of bitterness and disgust. Being told by a friend on one occasion to make frequent offerings of her sufferings, she said: "That has all been done right from the start; fearing the pains might become so intense that I would forget to make an offering of them to God, I recommended them to the care of the Blessed Virgin, that nothing would be lost."

Again, when a remark was passed on the excess of her pains, she declared: "It is the kind of suffering I am enduring," meaning the mental anguish. "I have a secret with God which makes me very happy that only God and myself know what I am suffering."

Insomnia was added to the afflictions of Sister Annella. However, it must be stated that immediately after Holy Communion she would fall into a deep sleep and apparently rest

for two or three hours. During this time her limbs and muscles constantly twitched and quivered—a truly pitiful sight. Upon awakening, the pains began anew and continued day and night. Sister Annella had no desire to relieve her sufferings by drugs. She was willing to empty the cup of bitterness to the very dregs.



Anna Zervas on her First Holy Communion Day

Strength to do this she asked and obtained from the Lord.

As the disease progressed, little thornlike stickers appeared imbedded in the pores; being pressed or drawn out, they left openings which remained for some time and caused considerable discomfort.

In the fall of the year 1924, Sister Annella's condition began slowly to improve, thanks to careful dieting and osteopathic treatment. She was once more able to leave her bed of pain and to visit the parish church. Skin grew anew over her emaciated body, her appetite returned, her weight increased considerably. It seemed as if her cure was merely a question of time. Still her body never regained its former normal condition: the flesh remained diseased, numerous running sores continued to cause great sufferings; the burning pain in her stomach could not be relieved. Careful medical examinations, however, discovered that all the inner organs of the patient were in normal condition.

During the following winter (1924-1925) Sister Annella was able to go about. When this state of affairs continued in the course of spring and a part of summer, she began to hope that soon she might be able to resume her former occupation as music



St. Benedict's Convent, St. Joseph, Minn.

teacher. God's Providence had willed otherwise. The ascent of a painful Calvary remained for her.

On one hot day of summer, her disease returned with redoubled force. The Sister had gone to church to make her confession. Immediately after the confession a violent attack of pain drove her out of church. Bathed in tears, she arrived home tormented by pangs and anguish of soul at the thought that she might have given scandal to others by the hurry with which she had left the place of worship. From this day forward she remained unable to attend any religious services; the last and most trying series of her afflictions was to begin. Daily the priest would bring to her sick room the "Bread of the Strong," which she received with ardent longing and devotion.

Symptoms that had hitherto not been observed in the patient began to develop. What had formerly pleased her, now annoyed her intensely; even the birds that flew past the window of her sick room would greatly irritate her—another form of mental suffering.

Accustomed to be active, the sick Sister at times busied herself with fancy work, read in the Bible or the lives of the Saints, or chanted sacred hymns. Ever interested in the welfare of others, she gladly gave advice whenever she was requested. Her own affairs she left in the hands of God, desiring that in all



Sister Annella on the day of her profession

things His Holy Will be done. Finding herself unable to pray on account of excessive pains, she said: "I offer my sufferings as prayer; if God desired that I should pray, He would give me the ability to do so."

RESIGNATION UNDER DIFFICULTIES

It is impossible to give an adequate description of the many phases which developed in the course of Sister Annella's strange ailment. We can merely hint at the various sources whence arose new and terrible pains and pangs for soul and body. The palms of her hands burst open and the fissures gave forth a sickening odor. Her body was covered with large festering ulcers, several of which had two and three openings. Her scalp was suppurating so profusely that it loosened and could be lifted up. Her skin peeled off in strips, and it became necessary to pack the body in cotton batting in order to protect it against the air. A vicious, fetid, light-greenish fluid oozed forth from the pores; at times, the perspiration was clear blood. The numerous ulcers on her legs caused a contraction of the muscles, forcing the patient to keep in a semi-reclining position on her bed of agony. Moreover, the slightest move of body or limbs proved extremely painful to her. The fever, varying between 100 and 103 degrees, never left her. Her hearing was tormented by certain sounds that would re-echo in her ears and cause great annoyance.

It must be repeated here that Sister Annella never lost her wonted cheerfulness and even temper in spite of these accumulated afflictions. Praying, chanting of hymns in honor of the Sacred Heart and the Blessed Virgin, reading and fancy work remained her favorite occupations. All who visited her left her highly edified.

Nor was she spared additional forms of torture. One day she described one of these as follows: "I feel as if steel needles were darting through my head and down to the shoulders; some of them even seem to pierce through my whole body. I can see them coming; they are terrible." Then she would try to ward them off with her hands.

Sister Annella was able to take only very little and light nourishment, although a ravening hunger afflicted her. During her

slumber she often dreamt of eating food which, however, seemed altogether tasteless to her.

Several times it appeared as if she had at last reached the end of her sufferings. Her parents summoned the parish priest that he might assist her in her dying hour. It seemed only a matter of minutes until the soul would be released from the tormented body. Yet, Sister Annella herself was convinced that the end was not so close at hand. She was still ready to endure further suffering, if it were God's Holy Will.

The consolation of being able to receive visitors, which is ordinarily enjoyed by the sick, was denied our patient. Because of her constant and excessive pains it seemed advisable to her parents to admit only close relatives and fellow religious to her sick room. It may be stated here that all physicians who had treated Sister Annella during her long illness were unanimous in declaring her ailment non-contagious.



Convent Chapel of St. Benedict's

If it happened that the pains became so intolerable that the

Sister would moan and weep, immediately the thought began to torment her soul that she might appear to others impatient or complaining. A profound anguish came over her soul when it seemed to her that "God Himself has forgotten that there is on earth such a poor creature like myself," as she was wont to express herself in such trying hours. But the loving trust in God that had been such a characteristic virtue of Sister Annella in her ailment never, even for a moment, failed her in time of dereliction. She remembered and frequently recited the words of her favorite poem: "How glad I shall be that anguish of spirit full often was mine, since anguish of spirit so often was Thine!" By ardent prayer she obtained strength to endure this interior abandonment unto the supreme purification of her soul.

TRIALS OF SOUL AND BODY

It is difficult to explain how a soul, living in a decaying body, such as Sister Annella's appeared to be, should still be harassed by violent assaults. Yet, this was the case. These trials often became so terrible that she would clasp her hands tightly, scream and roll in her bed, strain and groan. She then implored her mother to stay at her side, suddenly turned toward the window of her room and exclaimed in a commanding tone: "Begone!" as if rebuking some unseen being.

Her body and all its limbs became more emaciated day by day; still, all symptoms, pains and vexations continued, even increased.

Many novenas of prayers and Holy Masses had been offered up for the welfare of the sick Sister. But strange to say, her pains usually increased during these novenas. It was God's will that she should carry her cross to the top of Calvary. The conviction on her part that there was no cure for her ailment prevented her from asking for a cure. Neither did it cause her to grieve over her condition; on the contrary, she preserved her cheerfulness and perfect resignation, even desiring that her attendants share in her sentiments. Whenever it seemed that her mother might feel discouraged over the hopeless outlook into the future, Sister Annella consoled and comforted her, saying: "O mother, you have done all you could possibly do for me. There is no cure. It's God's holy Will!"

She remarked one day to a sister in religion who was with her: "Sister, I wish I could die." Immediately she feared that she might have scandalized the Sister and asked her pardon, declaring: "I do not wish to die; I am willing to live on and suffer as long as God wills it," and tears of compunction came to her eyes.

Sister Annella loved the virtue of humility. If it were possible, she would hide her bodily pains and mental anguish. When admiration for her heroic patience was expressed, she said: "Do not speak of that! I am only a heap of rottenness!"

For two years the mother of Sister Annella had cheerfully nursed her afflicted daughter. She had been happy when Mother Louise, O. S. B., of St. Benedict's Convent, had yielded to her urgent requests to permit her to take charge of the afflicted sister. She had considered it a great privilege to spend herself in the service of Christ's special friend. But, now a time came when she began to feel depressed and unable to continue the exhausting work. This humiliating trial she had kept to herself. At this time the former painful ailment, which had left her on the very day when she had taken her afflicted daughter to her home, returned to her with redoubled force. Intensely worried over this sad turn of events, and calling to God for help, she suddenly felt a strong determination to continue the care for her daughter at any cost. And, from that day forward, her ailment left her again and has never returned.

The body of our heroic sufferer had become so emaciated by continued suppuration and pains that she could be carried about like a child. Toward the end of her life another strange phenomenon of her ailment made its appearance. Satan seemed to have her singled out as one to be savagely persecuted to the very door of death. Her facial features became subject to sudden changes to such a degree that the beholder could well doubt if the person before him was the same one he had seen a moment before. At one time she had the appearance of an old debauched man, at another that of Satan himself. Yet, this did not affect Sister Annella in the least. She preserved her usual cheerfulness and resignation and successfully warded off the interior attacks of the tempter.

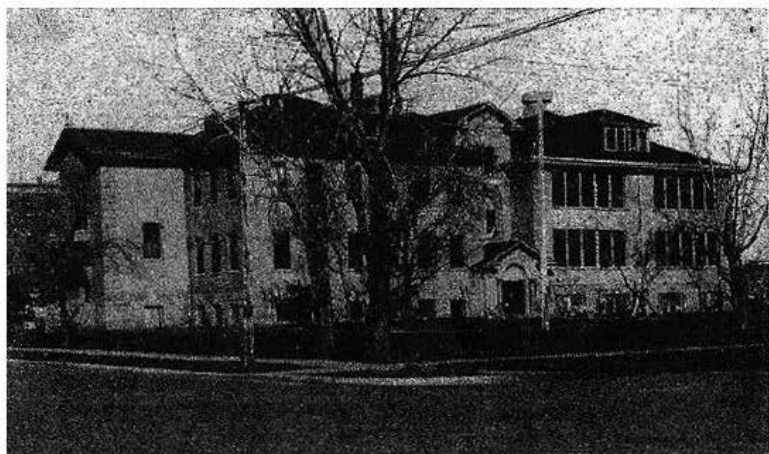
"Mother," she said one day, "it seems to me as if a thousand devils were around me." She also revealed to her parents that

as a child she had at regular intervals been subjected to sudden severe attacks of anger which she, however, had secretly and steadfastly overcome. Later on these trials had ceased to harass her soul.

During her prolonged ailment Sister Annella had experienced much supernatural consolation and interior joy. When she was reminded of the many relics of martyrs and other saints she had in her sick room, she replied: "I feel that Jesus is near me and that I am close to Him." During her most severe attacks of pain she exclaimed: "O Jesus, send me more pain, but give me strength to bear it." A public novena was held at the Shrine of Our Lady of Victory, Lackawanna, N. Y., August 5-14, 1926, in which Sister Annella had been included. During this time her sufferings increased considerably as had invariably been the case in previous novenas. Her death occurred on the day of the closing of this novena. The days preceding her death were a strange mixture of great joy and terrible mental agony.

Frequently the patient gave expression to her delight at the thought that soon she would be permitted to be with Jesus. "I am happy to be able to die soon. I do not wish you to pray for my recovery and I thank God for the sufferings He sent me."

The pains in her stomach increased in violence. "I feel as if

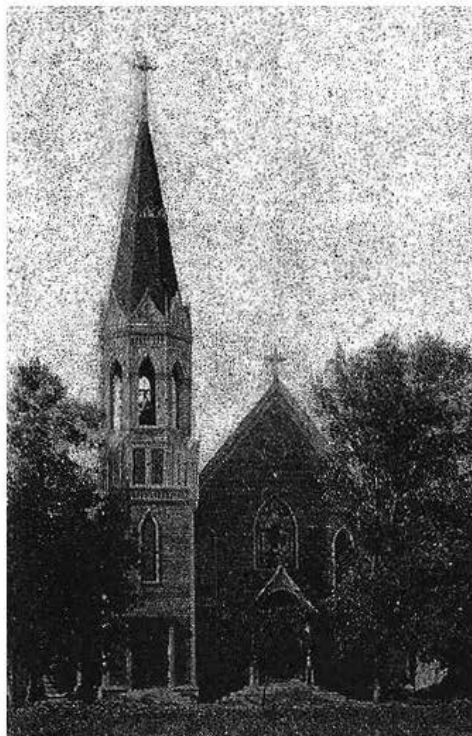


St. Mary's School and Convent at Bismarck, North Dakota, where Sister Annella taught music and where her painful suffering began

a hammer had struck me," she declared. And again: "I could write a book on my sickness," or, "I am buying for myself a ticket for eternity, and it is well worth its price." She seemed to have had a premonition that her death was not far off. The fancy work which had engaged her for many a lonely hour she handed to her mother, saying: "I cannot finish this." She had expressed her desire to celebrate the feast of the Assumption with Our Lady in heaven. This favor was granted her.

On the morning of August 13 it was discovered that during the night her face and tongue had become paralyzed. She asked to be permitted to communicate earlier that day. After she had received the Holy Eucharist, her death agony seemed to begin; a profuse perspiration of a brownish color covered her body, the skin pealed off anew. She exclaimed: "Oh, how delighted I shall be to see Jesus and His Blessed Mother and to converse with them." She even

consoled her sorrowing mother and sisters and repeatedly requested them to thank God. Later on she became very quiet and weak. Thinking that now the end was at hand, her parents summoned the parish priest to her bedside. Holy Viaticum was administered and the prayers for the dying were recited. After this the patient rallied again, but her cup of suffering was not yet full to overflowing.



St. Mary's Church at Bismarck, N. Dakota, where Sister Annella played the organ for a period of 5 years

Sister Annella was once more able to speak distinctly. Her desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ became more intense from hour to hour. She asked her mother to converse with her on heaven, consoled her, declaring that she would soon be with Jesus, Whose Bride in religion she had been and Who would not refuse her any request in behalf of her mother. After this she fell into a profound meditation, gazing through the window of her sick room toward heaven, then raising herself as if in ecstasy she began to recite aloud and distinctly the verses of her favorite poem "Rabboni": "When I am dying,—How glad I shall be— That the lamp of my life—Has been burned out for Thee!"

Toward evening she asked to see the priest. She then made her last confession. Repeatedly inquiring of her mother the hour of the day she said: "Oh, how long will it yet be!"

THE FINAL STRUGGLE

The last and most terrible struggle was approaching. The dying sister again and again requested that her bed and room be sprinkled with holy water. Satan's attack seemed to begin gradually. Fear and anxiety became noticeable in her look and behavior, waxing stronger with each succeeding minute. Suddenly uttering a piercing, heartrending shriek, Sister Annella seized her pillow with both hands and tried to cover her face, tossing from one side to the other, as if in an attempt to evade an unseen pursuer that was endeavoring to strangle her; screaming in horror and struggling with all her might, she caught hold of her mother's wrist and sent forth a wild cry of fear and anguish that could be heard at a great distance. Chilled to the heart by this shriek and by the terrifying look of her daughter, the mother tried vainly to loosen the iron grip of the ice-cold hands of the sufferer on her wrist. Still endeavoring to ward off her persecutor, the Sister at last fell back groaning in strained sounds as of one near strangulation. The frightened mother hastened downstairs to summon her husband from his place of business. As she held the telephone in her hands, her husband at the other end of the line was able to hear distinctly the strangling sounds of terror that came from Sister Annella's sick room. At this juncture the battle began to rage fiercely, beating sounds and continued screams were heard, as if the patient, whom her

mother had left alone in the room, were clashing with her adversary. Returning to Sister Annella's room, her mother found her in partly raised, partly kneeling posture with her right hand beating the air and repeating aloud: "Begone, you filthy creature! I can't bear to see you! begone!" adding various invocations to the Lord and His Blessed Mother for help as she was wont to do in previous attacks of physical pain and mental anguish. When her father eventually entered the room, she greeted him with a smile and said: "Thank God, it's over! I feel better now!"

After a brief pause the attack was resumed. Once more Sister Annella fell back struggling on for some time and giving forth the same strangling sounds as before. Later it was noticed that the double blanket with which she had been covered was so tangled and twisted that it was difficult to untangle. It bore mute evidence to the fierce combat that had taken place during the night. Sister Annella never revealed the details of this and similar previous trials. They seemed to belong to that secret which she had with her God.

Ere the attack had come to an end, the patient requested that she be given her reliquary crucifix. When she tried to bring the crucifix to her lips, she found herself unable to do so; even holding it with both hands and endeavoring with all her might to kiss the sign of Redemption, her hands against her will passed over her head as if an uncanny power were controlling them. Finally, her sister, who witnessed the struggle, pressed her own crucifix to the lips of the patient. The rosary was then recited by all present, an act of resignation was made, and the prayer to St. Benedict for a happy death said. During the last prayer

Meanwhile the priest had entered the sickroom carrying with him the Blessed Sacrament. He placed it on the communion table on which it had rested so often before. The invocations for the dying were said and absolution once more pronounced. It was thought advisable not to administer Holy Viaticum again.

The illustration on the opposite page, taken on August 15, 1925, shows the emaciated form of Sister Annella in the casket ready for burial. The small photograph at the head of the casket was made in 1923. The open reliquary cross, lying on the casket, which contains a relic of the true cross, was brought from Rome in 1925 by Rev. Father Kampmann, of Sauk Rapids, Minnesota, and presented by him to Sister Annella in the spring of 1926.



During her illness Sister Annella had repeatedly said: "I wonder if I will be afraid to die. You know I have to die all alone." Her Divine Savior, Whom she had so ardently loved in life, wished to be near His faithful spouse and aid her in her dying hour. She, who had so often before felt His special presence, was privileged to have Him near her in His sacramental species during her final struggle.

The tempest had calmed, a wonderful change had come over the exhausted frame. Bodily pain and mental anguish had given place to a delightful ease and contentment. Sister Annella appeared joyously triumphant. Peacefully she passed away in the presence of her Sacramental Lord, surrounded by her parents, brothers and sisters, and a group of fellow religious. It was August 14, 1926, the Vigil of the Feast of the Assumption. It had been her fervent wish and prayer to celebrate the Feast of Our Lady in heaven. The penetrating, nauseating odor of corrupt flesh that had followed in the wake of her ailment disappeared altogether from the moment of her passing. Her body was emaciated to such a degree by mental and physical sufferings and constant suppuration that its weight at death was less than forty pounds. She had attained the age of 26 years.

The remains of the heroic sufferer were carried to the parish church where she had so often visited and received her divine Lord. There she lay now in her simple casket of black, clothed in her religious habit, the crucifix she had kissed so often in extreme anguish in her hands—a picture of rest after long and cruel struggles.

Thence the body was removed to St. Joseph where, amid impressive monastic ceremonies, it was buried in the convent cemetery.

Here among her departed sisters in religion she rests under a simple cross, the emblem of sorrow and glory. May she, who had despised the world and its vanities and had chosen the cross and pain, confidently await the day of the glorious resurrection that has been promised to those who tread in the footsteps of their Crucified Savior.

Where in all the world do we find souls that have the courage to pray for more suffering as Sister Annella had done? Overwhelmed with pain and anguish, she was athirst with the spirit

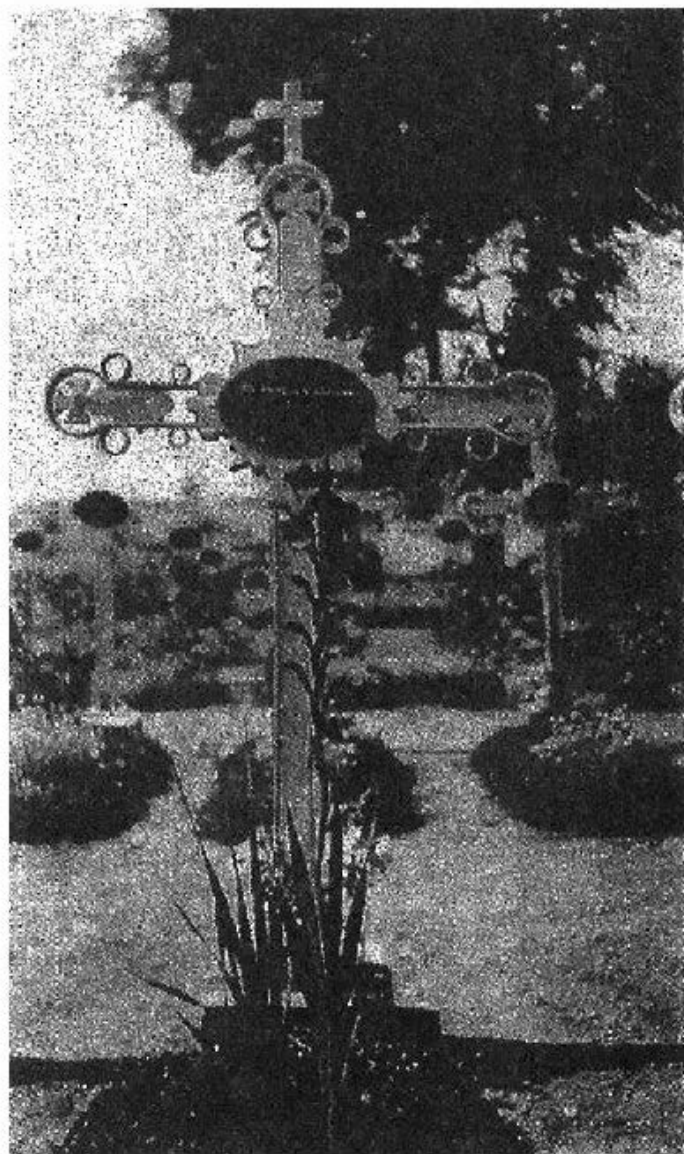
of sacrifice to such a degree that she asked for more suffering and the strength to endure it. There are, indeed, not a few souls that declare themselves willing to suffer much for Christ, but as soon as some grave affliction comes over them they begin to lament and complain, protesting that just this particular kind of suffering is intolerable. Not so Sister Annella. She was buying herself a ticket for eternity, paying the price by a long and painful ailment, and never shrank back from the series of sacrifices demanded of her.

Her sentiments are well expressed in the little poem penned by a missionary :

I thank Thee, Lord, for suffering;
I give Thee thanks for pain;
For those who share Thy passion here,
In heav'n shall share Thy reign—
And only those shall taste Thy joys
Who learn Thy cup to drain.
Though worldlings look on suffering
As evil, noxious, vain.
Faith sees it as the seal of Love,
Which Thou dost ever deign
To place upon Thy favored ones.
I thank Thee, Lord, for pain.

Sister Annella's example will serve to stimulate and encourage others to the cheerful performance of their duty in health, and to strengthen them, if sickness and affliction overtake them, by humbly submitting to God's holy will. In the world sorrows multiply, whilst resignation and the science of suffering daily decrease; there is no longer endurance and consolation. Sister Annella has left behind the precious heritage imparted by the practical lessons which her life and suffering teach us. Not a few have already learned this lesson and attested to being the recipients of signal favors and graces obtained through her example and intercession.





The grave of Sister Annella in the Convent Cemetery
of St. Benedict's, St. Joseph, Minn.