

Sister Benigna Paradiso (July 27, 1905 - September 21, 1984)

Sister Benigna, born on July 27, 1905 in Circello, Italy and baptized Donata Maria, entered the Congregation of the Sisters of St. John the Baptist on December 15, 1926 and received the habit on September 7, 1927. She came to the United States on August 13, 1928 while still a novice and pronounced her first vows on September 8, 1928 at St. John Villa Academy on Staten Island, N.Y. She remained at the Villa as assistant directress of the resident students until April 1929 when she was transferred to Our Lady of Loreto Day Nursery in Manhattan where she cooked and assisted with the care of the children. Later she was sent to St. John's Orphanage in Gladstone, New Jersey where she continued the same work. In 1935 she returned to Staten Island remaining there for three years and assuming the duty of cook and provider; most of her time, however, was spent in humbly begging for alms for the needs of the Community and children. In 1938 she continued the same work at Mt. St. John Convent in Purchase, New York remaining there until the time of her death.

Sister Benigna Paradiso was very humble, simple soul. She lived on earth, but her heart and mind were in "Paradiso" (heaven), for to her life meant Christ. For her, "living in the flesh" as St. Paul said, meant "productive toil" for the Community and its works throughout the world.

In her work, whether with the children, in the kitchen or in the streets begging, she met many people whom she helped spiritually as well as materially. She made many friends though often she did not know their names nor where they lived and worked, Sister Benigna had a smile, a "God bless you" and even a word of comfort or encouragement for everyone. She always expressed concern and love for those who spoke to her of their problems or asked for prayers.

Many, not knowing her name, called her "the little nun with the smile and a kind word." She was "a sweetheart" to some, a "holy woman" to others, and still to others she was "wonderful" or "beautiful" person. To some she was a "good natured, charitable Sister."

Not only did Sister Benigna possess such beautiful spiritual qualities, but she was an excellent cook and baker. Everyone clamored for her pastry, panettone, cookies and other goodies. Even the commercial bakers who donated bread and flour enjoyed her baking. Although she was out begging most of the day, she stayed up nights to bake not only for the Sisters, but for the benefactors as well as for friends, the Sisters' families and for the various activities and celebrations of the Community.

A few days before going to the hospital on September 3, she had baked several "panettones" and put them in the freezer. Several days later, before being taken to the ICU, she told one of the Sisters who visited her "let the Sisters eat the panettone that are in the freezer." This was her last visible act of love and concern for the Sisters whom she loved and cared for so dearly. The Community and the Sisters' needs always came first regardless of her tiredness or state of health.

The morning after having received the Sacrament of the Sick for the second time during her brief hospital stay, the Good Lord took her into Himself at 7:30 on Friday, September 21, 1984.

Sister Benigna, we shall miss you very much. Please pray for us and the needs of the Community.

MAY SHE REST IN PEACE!