

## *Wake Reflection for Sr. LaSalle Nannemann, OSF*

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January 3, 2012

*By Sr. Bernice Schuetz, OSF*

Readings: Acts 3:1-8

Response: Ps. 23

Gospel: Luke 1:45-55

“My soul proclaims your greatness, O My God,  
and my spirit has rejoiced in you, my Savior.  
For you have blessed me, poor and a serving woman.”

No wonder Sister LaSalle requested that the Magnificat be part of her funeral services. She lived it all her life. Christine Nannemann grew up in a small town in northern Missouri, and finished her high school at our IC Academy. As far as is known she had no further formal education. Living with her mother those early formative years must have been an endearing time for Christine. In addition to learning the art of cooking and serving, she also absorbed many of her mother's wise and clever witticisms. Sisters who lived with her tell of lively conversations, punctuated by just the right quote from her mother. Other than her mother, Christine relied on her God and her native talent for her professional training. She read every magazine that covered items about food or serving and remembered them well. The phrase “The hungry he has filled with good things” included so much more than merely setting food on the table, so far as Sister LaSalle was concerned. Although Christine did not ask to be a homemaker when she entered Mount Saint Francis, her novitiate mistress noted her gifts of a keen mind plus a natural grace for serving and planned for her to be missioned in our larger institutions. That trust was well taken, as Sister's entire life showed that she recognized “Homemaking is an art as well as a science.”

When Xavier Hospital first opened, Sister Dorothy Adams recalls, the kitchen team, consisting of Sister Mary Robertine Smith, Sister LaSalle, and Dorothy, would get up at 4 o'clock in the morning! Many days would find them still working late at night planning schedules and menus. Everything had to be just right before they went to bed. They agreed that all the food should be of high quality; not only for the patients but also for the doctors, employees and visitors. It was always LaSalle who would call their attention to the niceties that showed her love and care for each person. “Those trays for the patients upstairs will not do,” she might say. “They are not attractive. They look so drab. We must take out the creamed cauliflower and put in buttered carrots with a little fresh parsley.” This would be a typical comment. When the rest were dead on their feet, they had to make the exchange before they could finally go to bed.

Personally, I have always been a bit jealous of Sister LaSalle. She grew up in Wien, Missouri, the same town my father did. She knew my grandparents well and went to school with my father's younger brother John. I never saw my grandparents as they both had died before I was born. My father's sister Kate Schuetz married one of LaSalle's cousins, Henry Nannemann, and another sister joined the Benedictines from Atchison who were teaching in Wien when LaSalle

went to school there. Sister LaSalle has enriched my life greatly by sharing many of her memories of Dad's family that we would never have known about if it weren't for her.

After having served at Briar Cliff and Xavier, Sister LaSalle was sent to our newly acquired St. Mary's Hospital in Emporia, Kansas. Again, Sister worked wherever her skills were required and always with a graciousness which overshadowed the meagerness of the hospital finances. Like St. Peter, she had "neither silver nor gold," but her personal touch to the little extras allowed the patients to literally "leap and jump and praise God." That may be an exaggeration, but we would all agree that a satisfying meal does wonders for one's body and spirit. The first years in Emporia were hard. No money for recreation or entertainment. Sisters LaSalle and Joan Losey found relaxation and an outlet for their creativity in sewing smart looking clothes for themselves. When St. Mary's Hospital changed sponsorship in 1985, Sisters Joan and LaSalle went out to Cortez, Colorado where Joan found work as a Nurse Supervisor in Home Health Care and LaSalle as Homemaker for Social Services. It was in Cortez that it was found necessary to do surgery on Sister LaSalle's eyes. Even so, Sister's eyesight continued to fail. Having been with Sister Joan through several moves, Sister came home to the Mount in 2001.

Sister's entire demeanor showed that she was in close contact with her God and with Mary, his mother. She really did not need to read prayers anymore. She prayed many rosaries and had memorized many of the psalms. Watching her carefully during Mass one could detect that she was mouthing some of the prayers the priest was saying, so familiar were these prayers to this almost blind, gentle woman. Over the years Sister had trained her mind to remember all she needed to do. As her eyesight was failing and her general health also, LaSalle would often quote favorite truisms of her mother. She seemed to have one that would fit every occasion, bringing a light moment to a drab conversation. Or, if someone did not want to eat, she would say: "Not hungry now? Well, eat for the hunger that's coming."

Loss of eyesight is a terrible thing, but Sister found a bright side to it all. While I read the psalms at office, Sister prayed them from her heart. Sister LaSalle's peacefulness was evident and I believe it was because of her deep prayer life. Psalm 23 was chosen for our response today, and I would like to end with a quote from it now. If I listen carefully, I can hear her praying it-from her heart.

The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.  
In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me;  
He refreshes my soul.  
He guides me in right paths for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side,  
With your rod and your staff that give me courage."