

First Reading Colossians 3:15-17

Gospel Matthew 25:31-40

These Scriptures ought to be reflective of all of us who call ourselves Christians. They are the measuring stick for our lives as children of God.

In Lil's case I believe God has already said to her, "You measured up exceedingly well."

Lil was born in St. Leo, the oldest of 10 children. Later the family relocated to a farm near Sharon. Because her mother's health was poor, Lillian assumed major family responsibilities early in life.

When she was 8, her father took her into town with a grocery list and told her she needed to do the shopping while he ran other errands. Thankfully the grocer wasn't busy so he helped her locate what she needed.

She started preparing meals at the same age under the direction of her father. I'm told that if the other children didn't like what she cooked, dad said to eat it anyway!

I'm quite sure that many of the skills she used so effectively in her nursing career she began learning at home, both skills of organization but more importantly of compassion and caring.

Sister Lillian entered the Dominican Sisters in 1956, part of a large group who are celebrating their 65<sup>th</sup> jubilee this year.

Her nursing career began in the states. Her reputation as a competent and caring nurse is without question and still remembered by so many for whom she cared. In her funeral plans she asked that her Philosophy of Nursing be shared.

*"To give to others the fruits of contemplation" is a Dominican ideal I treasure. I see nursing as a profession with deep Christian roots in the experience of healing. I view each person as uniquely created by God and I have some precious moments to support a person during their healing journey.*

*Life is part of nature and everything I see in nature has dynamic self-sustaining and self-repairing gifts. Life is created by and held in God's healing hand. I see nursing as a mission to sustain and enhance human dignity.*

*As a professional nurse I am committed to encouraging others to be responsible for their health and quality of life. I am also committed to a mission of sustaining and enhancing human life with dignity from conception until death. All people are uniquely created by God and deserve the best possible care that I can provide by responding attentively to their needs for the time I am privileged to be present to them.*

In 1965 Lil was called from ministry at the hospital in Lamar to missionary service in Nigeria. According to her own written remembrances she left for Nigeria so quickly that there was no time for either a course in Hausa or one in midwifery.

Assigned to the hospital in Yelwa she wrote, "The patients all greeted me with 'Na ji sauki'. I figured it must be a greeting so I replied to each with the same words. Later on I found out I was actually saying "I am better" to each of them. But they seemed happy. I wanted to heal as Jesus did. I delighted in caring for each person that came my way."

After 5 years in Yelwa Lil moved to the clinic in Gusau where the daily census ranged from 200-500 a day. She learned to love clinic work despite the many demands on both time and energy.

She later worked at the government hospital in Gusau. I'll quote Sr. Frances Biernacki's description of her service there. Sr. Frances wrote:

One night I accompanied Sr. Lillian to the hospital to check on a very sick patient and was appalled to see so many sick women together. Sr. Lillian manages a 30 bed women's ward, usually filled. She, with her deep seated dedication, suffers much with her patients and often times is frustrated because of lack of medication, nurses, and available doctors. She helps save lives when possible and when not, like Mother Teresa of Calcutta, she helps them die with dignity and love. She gives noble and unselfish service in indescribably unhealthy surroundings.

Sister Rita, who still ministers in Nigeria, said, "We Sisters lived in what could be termed a hostile or less than welcoming environment in some ways. Now we talk about inter-religious dialogue but Lillian exhibited inter-religious living. Most patients in Gusau were not Christian. That made no difference to Lillian. Patients came to the house when she was not on duty. I recall one poor man saying, "You see this Sister? For everyone she is the same. Whether you are rich or poor, Muslim or Christian, she treats everyone the same." She modelled for the Nigerian Sisters one of the basic reasons for their founding, -- to be a Christian presence in a Muslim environment."

After her many years of nursing she was asked to be director of novices for the Nigerian congregation. She kept a list of all her novices in her bible and recently shared it with me. On the list are all four of the women who have been prioress of the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena. Sister Justina, the current prioress, said of Sister Lillian:

As novice directress, she was gentle but firm. She had a way of making us comply with instructions without being high-handed or condescending. When she would say something like, "Would you like to go and help the procurator put stuff away in the pantry, okay?" The novice knew straightaway that she had to be on her way to the pantry. Sr. Lillian was unassuming and a gentle, graceful presence amongst us. Her virtues of humility, simplicity, honesty, caring, generosity, hospitality and modesty were the way she ingrained in the hearts of her novices, the essence of the Dominican life. She was a book of the Dominican life!

In the days before her death a number of “her novices” reached out to her across the miles with phone calls and email messages, assuring her of their love and prayers.

I had the privilege of visiting Nigeria three times during Lil’s time there. From my many memories I will share just two.

When I visited Yelwa, Terry took me to a Kamberi village in the bush. I remember a collection of 10-12 mud huts and I was very surprised to see Lil’s picture tacked outside the entrance to three or four of them. I learned there had been a measles epidemic and when parents tried to take their very ill children to the hospital, they found the hospital was full. Lil nursed the children at the sisters’ compound, staying up around the clock to monitor IV drips and bathe them in tepid water to reduce their fevers. She told me she only lost one baby. One of the little girls she saved is now a Dominican Sister. She was a hero to the villagers!

I also remember Halema, the wife of the Muslim cook in Gusau, who told me proudly, “My husband only needs me, his one wife, because we have many children. All my babies lived because Sr. Lillian was with me every time I birthed!”

After 29 years in Nigeria, Lil decided to return to the states. She was on the staff of Central Kansas Medical Center for 11 years and many who worked with her still remember her fondly. Then she completed a Clinical Pastoral Education course and ministered as chaplain at Villa Maria in Mulvane.

I could go on and on but you have your own memories to share and we want to hear them.

I will conclude with the lines from Psalm 139 with which Lil ended her own remembrances:

O God, you have searched me and you know me.  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up,  
You search out my path and know all my ways.  
I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works!