

Eulogy for Sister Hilda Harold FMDM

Our dear Hilda – where do we start remembering your long life?

Hilda was born in Dunbar, East Lothian, Scotland on the 27th September 1925 to Walter and Elizabeth Harold. She was the eldest of three children, having a younger sister, Valerie, and an even younger brother, Edward.

Hilda spent her school years at the Mercy Convent School, Garnethill, Glasgow, she was studious gaining her Senior Leaving Certificate in 1942, with higher grades in English, History, Mathematics, French and Science. She undertook a four-year nursing training programme at the Victoria Infirmary, Glasgow, graduating as a general nurse in March 1948.

In October 1948, she entered the postulancy in Mount Alvernia, Guildford just a few days after her 23rd birthday. She received the religious name of Sister Kentigern, the patron saint of Glasgow. St Kentigern, also known as St Mungo – the dear one... She liked the name Kentigern, and this was unofficially shortened to “Kenti”. But when the opportunity arose, Hilda returned to her baptismal name. Her baptismal name was very special to her. St Hilda of Whitby being an encouragement and model for her life. Interestingly, Hilda’s father, Walter, was born in Beverley, East Yorkshire.

The day following her First Profession in April 1951, she was given her first mission assignment to work in the dispensary of the Leper Settlement at Kasaba. She started that long journey by boat, to South Africa, then by train up through Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to the remote Mission in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia).

In 1955 Hilda returned to the UK, nursing in various communities in England and Ireland, she often said that her happiest nursing days were when she was working in Portiuncula Hospital Ballinasloe. In 1968, Hilda became involved in parish work in Aldershot and then in Dundee, back in her beloved Scotland. Hilda was well loved and well known around Aldershot, riding her Moped Scooter, with a very straight back, flowing habit, and crash helmet to top it all off!

Sadly, in the early 1990’s Hilda’s health began to fail, and she needed care and support, moving to La Verna community in December 1991. Hilda experienced prolonged periods of silence and immobility, a time of suffering and pain, she showed fortitude, never complaining, she simply carried her cross.

She loved nature particularly birds, at one stage she had a budgerigar, unfortunately not too well behaved, and it was soon found a new home... Nothing daunted, Hilda turned to bird watching from her window, there was a special robin that gave her much pleasure, as did the deer, rabbits, squirrels and foxes that passed by, wild flowers, and in spring, snowdrops covering the ground.

Hilda had a very keen artistic eye, she could capture a scene - stormy seas in Scotland, calm beaches on the south coast, flowers, birds and portraits were all attempted and beautifully produced. Hilda was also an accomplished needle woman, her embroidery being very fine and very creative. For her Golden Jubilee, Hilda commissioned her sister, Val, to paint a picture of Saint Francis giving his cloak to a poor man, it had a real and rich meaning for Hilda, as she celebrated and continued to live her life of dedication. A copy of the painting can be found on the front cover of the Mass Booklet. This painting of St Francis, a portrait of the family cat, Samson, and a beautiful arrangement of snowdrops all painted by Val for Hilda, were among the paintings adorning the walls of her room. The artistic, creative eye very strong in the family genes.

Hilda loved her family, she always showed great interest in all that was happening, she enjoyed visits, phone calls, letters, cards and celebrations. There was always great excitement when Edward visited. Flying down from Glasgow in the early morning and returning after a hectic day with Hilda in the evening. She was also so pleased, especially when your dear wife, Valerie, was able to accompany you. She was very proud of her nephews and niece, Stephanie, when you graduated, Ken, your book on Tort Law proudly displayed on her book shelf, Gordon, memories of you as a young lad and Adrian, accompanying your Dad from Glasgow on his last visit to see Hilda in October was very special.

On one occasion, she was sent a beautiful orchid, she was delighted, it was excellently boxed by Marks and Spencers, she had much joy opening the box, admiring the orchid, then she read the label, it was addressed to Lady Hilda Harold! A reminder of this always brought a smile to her face, and laughter. Thank you, M & S, she did relish being called Lady Hilda Harold.

Hilda was a proud owner of an electric wheelchair, this gave her freedom, daily she would sit outside the front door of La Verna, sun, rain, wind or snow, she enjoyed the view and quietness, listening to the birds, listening to the wind. In her later years, it became a Sunday morning custom to sit in the garden with Chris Feeley, enjoying each other's company, the companionship, sharing each other's lives as they journeyed.

Sadly, Hilda's eyesight and hearing began to diminish, this was difficult, another cross which she bravely bore, but she could still turn her electric wheelchair carefully in a very small space, or as she said "on a penny". Latterly her driving abilities began to fail, there is evidence of her woodwork skills around La Verna – that is chunks of wood missing out of doorposts! When she was no longer able to use her electric wheelchair, it became another burden, she had to rely totally on the care staff, but she was always so gracious - her thanks perfuse and genuine.

She never neglected community prayers; she was always present. I think Fr David Myers is missing her assistance with the prayers at daily Mass. On St Stephen's Day, Hilda became very frail, her room became her sanctuary, her sacred space, quietly she slowly began her final earthly journey to her God.

Hilda would lift up her arms and kept repeating "I am reaching for the sky". One of the care staff, with tears in her eyes, said "Hilda is calling for her God". On the feast of the Epiphany, Three Royal Kings came to escort her home, to meet her God face to face. Hilda died peacefully at 4.30 in the morning.

Thank you, Hilda, for the example of your life.
Like St Kentigern, your true faith shone out.
Like St Hilda, you responded willingly and faithfully to God's call.
In your wisdom, you used the gifts given to you,
In your suffering, you bore the cross given to you.
All this made your life richly and spiritually blessed.
May you now fully celebrate eternal glory with your God.
Hilda, may you rest in peace. Amen.

*Eulogy given by Moira Olliver at Hilda Harold's Funeral Mass
held in Ladywell Chapel on 21 January 2020*