

Sr Mary Magdalene Cheng (24 Mar 1924-16 June 2017)



Sr died on 16 June 2017 at 93



Sr's last photo with her family

Eulogy of Sr Mary Magdalen by Daniel Ee, nephew

Good morning Rev Frs, Sr Maria and Rev Srs, relatives and friends of Sr Mary Magdalen.

Thank you Sr Maria for inviting me to deliver the eulogy. I am Daniel, a nephew of Sr Mary Magdalen. My mother was the eldest child in the family of 9 and next week 27 June would be her first death anniversary.

In her simple, humble and gentle ways, Sr Mary Magdalen or Tai Ee, Si-Ee or Lau-Ee to some of us, has been an inspiration to many of us. As I reflected on what defined her, three qualities stand out. These are a deep love of God, love of neighbour and discipline.

First her deep love of God. We could find her praying often and our conversations would somehow focus on prayer. She fits the description of a prayer warrior. She has two younger sisters in Singapore. Aunty Cecilia said that she remembers her sister for praying for individual members of the family. My wife, Shelley, and I visited her here in St Teresa's Home over the years and she would assure us by saying, "I pray for you every day, for your family and for your work in Worldwide Marriage Encounter." And you would find her, together with Sr Bernard and Sr Joseph, in the chapel praying the rosary.

The second quality was love of neighbour. Another word would be "other-centred". She was a quiet lady, not one to be up in front speaking to a crowd. Yet she had a gift of making one feel comfortable in her presence. Another younger sister, Aunty Anna, remembers her in their younger days as a very friendly girl who could chat with people easily and was well liked as a result. Another clear example of her other-centredness was how she would wake up in the wee hours of the morning just after midnight to take her shower and then go back to sleep, only to wake up a few hours later. We asked her why she did it. She said she did not want to add to the queue in the later hours. And, despite her inability to walk after her bad fall a few years ago, she would move around on her own in her wheelchair, transfer herself to and from the bed and shower herself. What a feat for someone who could not walk anymore! What probably went through her mind was that she did not want to bother the staff whom she knew would be busy attending to many others.

The third quality is discipline, a word which shares the same root as Disciple. I remember how impressed I was seeing a few Sudoku books on her side table after she had the bad fall and decided to become a resident. She very much wanted to be independent, not to be a burden to others, so she kept her mind working by playing Sudoku. And she had that cherubic smile saying that she enjoyed the game.

I will now read a sharing that came last night from Fr Lionel, a Franciscan friar who is Aunty Anna's son and is based in Jerusalem. It really captures all three qualities.

"When I was a novice, Si Ee brought us to visit the lepers at Silra Home. She and other sisters went to visit and give communion and prayed in Teochew with the lepers. We went several times with her. She used to say she was afraid to go but the lepers are lonely and need Christ so we must overcome our fear in order to serve them.

That was the beginning of my work with the poor.... And eventually work with Mother Teresa's sisters serving the poorest of the poor in the Arab countries – in Palestine, Israel, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon.”

We thank the Lord for the gift of Sr Mary Magdalen to us in the different families of her siblings and to many others who came to know her over the years. In her simple, humble and gentle ways, her actions spoke much louder than words.

Last Sunday, during Mass to celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi, we sang a beautiful hymn – This is My Body. As the hymn was sung, I found the last two verses as a description of how she had lived her life. I don't have a good voice, so will ask my daughter Clare to sing just the two verses. In these verses, Jesus tells us how we should lead our lives:

Filled with my Spirit, how you will grow!

You are my branches; I am the tree.

*If you are faithful, others will know
you are alive in me.*

*Love one another - I have loved you,
and I have shown you how to be free;
serve one another, and when you do,
do it in love for me.*