

Reflection for Sister Roberta Grzelak, CDP
Liturgy of Resurrection
Micah 6:8 ~ Ephesians 3: 16 – 21 ~ John 6: 1 – 14

September 18, 2014

In the name of all of the Sisters of Divine Providence and their Associates, I welcome you (names will be mentioned once I see who is there in Chapel) to the Celebration of the Life of Roberta! And, I offer you my sympathy and prayerful support at this time. May our God of Peace be with you.

I would like to begin this reflection by sharing a quote from Roberta. Roberta's life in ministry and community certainly gave witness to these words:

**“I am totally committed to the Social Justice Charism of both of our founders,
Bishop Ketteler and Mother Marie.
This has defined my life:
working to help/empower the poor;
compassionately caring for and about the vulnerable, being the voice of the poor,
empowering families and communities.”**

Let us look to our first reading from the Prophet Micah.

This is what Yahweh asks of you: to act justly

Roberta's compassion for the poor and her sense of justice ministering tirelessly with people who live on the margins was the hallmark of her ministry in the “second-half” of her life.

After she returned to Puerto Rico in 1986, it didn't take long for her to realize that she was being invited to do something more, to be in direct service with the poor because she saw so much and couldn't close her eyes on what she saw. She was moved with compassion. Her heart was so touched and it was evident to anyone who spent time in conversation with her.

She began OPDH, as we heard Angelica express so beautifully last evening, a heart-felt social service agency that identifies people at risk, especially women and children, and helps them obtain the services they so desperately needed to change the course of their lives.

In addition to the **Program for Single Mothers and their Children**, the personnel can be very proud of its well-known **Building Self-Esteem Program** for youth and young adults and a very strong **Community Development Program** which give people the skills to become leaders in their communities.

Under her leadership, and with an extremely dedicated staff, Roberta managed “to make OPDH an office where the services were designed to make people become self-sufficient!!” She was, as Annie stated so well: “... in love with and committed to Puerto Rico and its people. **For her there were no impossibles.**” (Annie)

When she returned to the United States in 2009 she continued her selfless ministry at St. Regis Parish in Oakland where she committed herself to learn the “legal system” in order to attend to those who came. She journeyed with people whose spouses were going to be deported as well as with undocumented individuals. She embraced people and was present, fully present to them in their need. Her knowledge of Spanish was an asset. I understand that people came from other places in the city came because they knew they would find, in her, a person who would listen.

One woman from the parish related a story of Roberta’s wisdom. If you had a problem, she said, you were always welcome to come to talk with her. She would close her eyes and sit for a minute, then open her eyes and say something wise to help you. She was gentle, listened lovingly and spoke deliberately. Perhaps some of you were blessed with her wisdom.

Roberta was about justice to the present time ~ justice ministry right up until the moment she was taken to the hospital the evening before Ketteler Day. She truly met the needs of her day like Bishop Ketteler encouraged us to do so.

This is what Yahweh asks of you: to love tenderly ~ to show constant love

Roberta loved our Community! She did not hesitate to accept the invitation to mentor some of our “newer” members, Sally and most recently, Wendolyn (in ministry). She offered her time and talents by serving on many committees throughout her years. People express how thoughtful, cheerful and supportive she was.

When you talk to anyone, they will always comment on how much Roberta loved people and that she had a big heart for all. Others shared with me that they always felt included and everyone was made to feel as if they were the most important person! She was a positive person, inclusive and accepting of everyone.

Her heart was bigger than anyone could imagine. We heard so many touching and personal stories last evening. A friend wrote:

“I saw Sister Roberta share with the humblest, the most needy and be a loving person with them but also I saw her with politicians, wealthy people and she was one of a kind, everyone loved her!! ... her main concern was that of needy and to uphold the dignity of every human being !!!!!” (Annie)

This is what Yahweh asks of you: to walk humbly with your God

While she received numerous awards and accolades (including the Ketteler Award in 2003) and accepted them graciously on behalf of the Community, her true concern was about what **really mattered** in the lives of those around her.

I believe Roberta knew “the truth” and lived “the truth of the Gospel.” She knew what really mattered. I also believe she came to these truths through her intimate relationship with our Provident God, whom she desired to follow her entire life.

Roberta delighted in simple things! She often expressed gratitude, profound gratitude for everything, in her unassuming and spontaneous way! She was extremely grateful for all the blessings and gifts she received in Community.

A Gospel of Providence ~ one of sharing generously

The Gospel chosen for today's celebration depicts the philosophy that permeated Roberta's life. We know it as a Gospel of Providence, one of sharing generously even in the midst of our scarcity. Roberta believed that it is in sharing what we have that more is created.

When you saw a sparkle in her eyes, you knew she was up to something! Resources came to her because she trusted and believed in the goodness of all people to help and be of service. As she was the Face and Hands of Providence, she inspired others to be the same.

Roberta embraced the charism of Providence wholeheartedly, for she believed that ministry was about empowering people. In Roberta's own words:

"Everything we do reflects Providence spirituality.

We don't do things for people.

We find out what people can do for themselves and how they can help each other. We train our staff to be agents of change and transformation.

By sharing, we create more.

It doesn't come down from heaven, but from sharing and working together.

Providence is the way we work, grow, provide."

I close with a quote from Annie Echegary:

"I do not know how she did it but at Christmas time there was a gift for each employee and their children!!

The multiplication of fishes and bread!!

That was Sister Roberta, good-natured, entrepreneur, bright, intelligent with a heart of gold and great faith in Divine Providence!!"

We entrust you now, Roberta, into the loving embrace of our Provident God. Somehow I don't think your "ministry" is over! Many are continuing to entrust their prayers and lives to you. May you live in peace.