

## EPIPHANY 2018

*"This Newborn Star no one had ever found  
in heavens all around  
appeared without a sound;  
This Newborn Star no one could ever find  
til fullness of God's time,  
when Jesus was come down;  
This Newborn Star we find...  
and we are found."*

Our beloved Rodger wrote these inspired lyrics in 2011. This past Christmas his master opus was finally heard outside of his beloved community of Therese of Divine Peace, when it was performed at a special Christmas concert in a large Lutheran Church somewhere on the East Coast, thanks to his former colleague and dear friend Louise. She requested a few words about the piece, and I wrote: *I find it to be Rodger at his tenderest; his most vulnerable self is poured out in this work. It IS his Epiphany. And we all share that Epiphany with him whenever we listen to it with our hearts. ...His star shines brightly in the lives of all who love him, all who have been loved by him.*

That is, of course, beginning this letter at year's end, we still being in the Season of Christmas 2017-18 as we celebrate our Epiphany. Going back to last January, Clara Violet McGrath was born on January 17, second daughter of my grandson Seamus and his lovely wife Andrea, and great-grandchild number 14 for me. January continues to be a busy month of family birthdays, Clara claiming spot number seven in that regard!

In February, Therese founding member Joe moved permanently into the Little Sisters of the Poor Nursing Home. He is, of course, being very well looked after, and he is very happy to be there, but he leaves a hole in our community. We are all happy when he makes an occasional appearance, celebrates with us, and shares his constant prayer: That we may hate no person...

On the day after Joe's move to the Little Sisters, St. Valentine's Day, Catie was admitted into the hospital. She had been feeling ill more often than not for a few months already, but repeated visits to the doctor had yielded no diagnoses. She eventually ended up in the ER, diagnosed with pneumonia, and admitted for treatment and a battery of tests. Catie had lung cancer, and it had metastasized into brain, lymph nodes, and bones. She fought the good fight to live, and we of the Therese and Great Waters communities invoked Father Augustus Tolton for a miracle of healing.

In April I made a road trip, hitching a ride to Cleveland, Ohio with good friends Sharon and Jonathan, where we visited with relocated Therese founding members Laura and Ron for a great, fun-filled weekend, complete with a trip to my beloved Lake Erie.

In May, RCWP Bishop Joan came to St. Louis to secretly ordain Catie in her nursing home bed. Catie had by then declined any further treatment and was determined to fight the good fight to death. Presenting her for ordination was her program coordinator Rev. Mary, while I spoke on her behalf as her mentor and pastor. No one else was told of the catacomb event until after Catie had passed into new life, per her wishes, so as not to chance the possibility of her expulsion from the Catholic nursing home.

Also in May, for Mother's Day, my son-in-law Dave presented daughter Virginia and me with an awesome gift: VIP tickets to an evening with Bob Gibson and Tim McCarver. (For those of you who have not been privileged to be fans of the St. Louis Baseball Cardinals your entire lives, Gibby and Tim were battery-mates during the Cardinals winning years in the 1960's.) It was a wonderfully memorable evening, and we have the pictures to prove it!

July found me on the road again, this time with Rev. Judith, as we drove together to Madison, Wisconsin for a weeklong RCWP-USA Council meeting that I would have done well to miss. Actually, I pretty much *did* miss it, because my left (good ear) hearing aid malfunctioned on day two and I was virtually deaf for the whole week. To add insult to injury, when Judith and I got back to my home (where she was spending the night before continuing on to her home in Kansas City, Missouri), we found the A/C off and the house holding the heat nicely!

On July 30, I celebrated Last Rites for Catie. Present with us were Catie's brother and sister-in-law Philip and Anne, and Therese members Bob and Sue. Catie won her most difficult battle – the battle to die well – on August 1. I did her Final Commendation at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery on August 7, and then we doubled back and celebrated her Memorial Mass at Therese. Having lost Rodger in 2013, and Mary Ellen (my

cousin and in the Therese family) in 2014, we were ill-prepared to lose Catie in 2017. But now her star, too, shines brightly in the lives of all who love her, all who have been loved by her.

On August 21, the day of the Solar Eclipse, my daughter Virginia and I spent four hours on my deck watching it, from beginning to end, as the Sun moved from the back edge of my roof to the front. We had a glorious and intimate front row seat to this phenomenal sacred event, an experience of epic proportion that was an incredible gift for the two of us.

October found me on the road yet again. I made this trip with sister priests, the Revs. Kathy and Sue, for the ordination to the priesthood of Rev. Claudia in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Claudia being the eighteenth (and final) ordinand who I was responsible for as the Great Waters Region's program coordinator, this was a really nostalgic celebration for me. What an awesome and humbling ministry of epiphanies!

November 1, birthday of my youngest grandson Joshua, was also the day that his dad (my son John) officially moved into the old homestead on Arsenal. What a relief that was and will continue to be for me. And the fact that John and his dog Lady love it there is absolutely icing on the cake!

During this year of epiphanies, my sister colleague Ree and I also noted the tenth anniversary of our ordinations and the founding of Therese of Divine Peace with a joyous celebration on November 11 (the actual date of the priestly ordinations that shook St. Louis and the worldwide Roman Catholic hierarchy when they took place in the "Shelter of Peace," the synagogue of the Central Reform Congregation). This celebration day was considerably smaller, of course, than that one in 2007 – roughly 600 participants smaller! – but wondrous and joyous and Spirit-filled. Ree came from her current home in Sedona, Arizona, for the occasion and monthlong vacation during which she visited with family and friends.

November also found me doing a Final Commendation rite in the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery for the second time, as Bob, the husband of long-time friend Flo, had died in Florida in September, and his ashes were sent back here for interment. And this was immediately after our annual Memorial Mass, which this year celebrated the new lives of 25 family and friends of Therese members.

And for three weeks at the end of November, the Therese family was blessed to have our sister Jean back with us, as she was taking a short vacation from her current missionary work with immigrants and refugees in Austria.

The McGrath/Kennedy family gathering for Christmas was back where it belongs this year, in the old Arsenal homestead, and what a gift that I was not the one doing the cooking and cleaning! And I was very happy to go home afterwards, as this second Christmas in my new home is truly a blessing. Life, and every amazing epiphany of life, is blessing. And everyone who has read this letter from beginning to end is blessing as well! May all the days and nights of 2018 be blessing for all of us, as we individually and collectively do our part to be blessing for this world in which we live.

Shalom and Love and Shining Epiphanies-