



Celebration of the Lives of Churchwomen

Dorothy, Jean, Ita, Maura

Introduction:

The Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland welcome you to a Vigil Celebration of the Fortieth Anniversary of the martyrdom of the four Northamerican Churchwomen of El Salvador. As we commemorate our Sister Dorothy along with her companions, lay missionary Jean Donovan, and Maryknoll Sisters Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, we are inspired by your ongoing solidarity throughout these forty years

Over these past many years, Dorothy, Jean, Ita, and Maura have been constant companions and guides for all of us as we have confronted our fears and discerned actions for justice in our times. We unite our daily struggles to be faith-filled witnesses with the many prophetic people throughout history who have suffered for the good of others.

We pray this prayer, recognizing the **gifts** of our martyred sisters that were offered so freely and valiantly. We seek to embrace their **courage** in following God's call as willingly as they did. Remembering that it was **compassion** that drew them, despite their fears, to serve joyfully in El Salvador, we ask to live as compassionately as they did in living out the mission of Jesus today. We pray for **integrity of heart** and **deep trust in God's presence** as we respond to the people and places where we are needed now.

And so we pray with John:

Teach us your ways, O loving God to be of service in ways that we cannot even imagine. Open us to your Anawim, "For this is love, that we walk in obedience to God's commands. As we have heard from the beginning that God's command is that we walk in love." (2 John 6)

Reflection: Writings of the Churchwomen:

Each of the Churchwomen with her unique gifts and personality, gave herself freely to God's mission. God molded each one of them to become a woman of integrity of heart who ultimately surrendered all in love.

Let us take time now to let their **words** penetrate our hearts so that we may learn how to surrender to God's shaping of each of us.

Jean:

"I have not been spending a lot of time praying. I see so many people doing so much good all the time – and it comes easy to them. And you know, I think that sin comes so easy to me and being good is the hard part. .I just don't have that spontaneous spirituality . . . I can't seem to put myself in that childlike relationship to God .. I'm too independent, and I'm afraid to be dependent, even on God" (Fall 1979).*

R. God of Compassion, you are always nearby.

Dorothy:

"The steadfast faith and courage our leaders have to continue preaching the Word of the Lord even when it might mean 'laying down your life' . . .in the very **real** sense is always a point of admiration and a most vivid realization JESUS is **here** with us. Yes, we have a sense of waiting, hoping, and yearning for a complete realization of the Kingdom, and yet we know it will come because we can celebrate Him here right now!"*

R. God of Compassion, you are always nearby.

Ita:

"Working with the poor means promoting and then allowing the person to be subject of his own destiny, instead of forming him in our image . . . Being with the poor means overcoming our distaste of getting dirty literally and supporting the sinner, the underdog, and the unpopular causes; running the risk of being accused as subversives."*

R. God of Compassion, you are always nearby.

Maura:

"Some of these poor people live in a one-room hovel -- very dark and miserable. They sell in the market and just live hand to mouth. I am trying to get to know them, and after a while, we form the Family of God, which is a way to unite them to solve their own problems and to be formed in their faith."*

R. God of Compassion, you are always nearby.

For a deeper understanding of the spiritual journeys of these four women and the ultimate sacrifice of their lives, read the article by Ed and Donna Brett in the fall issue of *US Catholic Historian*, “The Spiritual Journey of the Four Churchwomen”:

<https://www.ursulinesisters.org/files/assets/uschfall2020bretts.pdf>

Closing Prayer:

Let us pray.

Holy One, we honor the lives of the four Churchwomen who were good news for the people of El Salvador. Even in the darkness of war and the tragedy of so many deaths, their light brought grace and love to the lives and hearts of those among whom they ministered.

Responding to your call, Maura, Jean, Dorothy, and Ita came to a country named after our Savior. In the midst of great poverty, they learned to share the joy of the people; they learned to walk with the people up the mountain of hope to see the promise of new life; they learned to comfort and console their Salvadoran friends as war tore through families and villages; they became “eucharist” to the crucified peoples of El Salvador whose spirit could not be destroyed by darkness and evil.

And so we ask for your grace that our lives, like theirs, may be lived always in response to your call, that we too may be light in the darkness of our suffering world, joy in the midst of piercing pain, and love in the presence of hatred and division.

We pray for all of this in the name of the God of Compassion, who is always nearby. Amen!

- Quotations taken from *Martyrs of Hope* by Donna Whitson Brett and Edward T. Brett, Orbis Books, 2018.