

The page of the coloring book Sr. Bernice Jordan offered me (Honorine Uwimana)



by Honorine Uwimana

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Editor's note: *Notes from the Field* includes reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with [Catholic Volunteer Network](#), the project began in the summer of 2015. This is our 10th round of bloggers: Honorine Uwimana is a St. Joseph Worker in Orange, California, and Samantha Kominiarek is an Assumption Mission Associate in Chaparral, New Mexico.

As I penned this passage,

Pain took hold of my hands, pushed me to write one word after another

Chose the alphabets, and I conceded to free my heart of a heavy chagrin

That pinned in me a farewell song.

It is Dec. 28, 2019, and my tears have a name:

Sr. Bernice Jordan.

This piece is about you,

This last teardrop is for you, and so is paradise,

May heaven do better what I was not able to do in the few days I was gifted to spend

with you.

Sister Bernice: "I have colored half of this flower, but I am no longer able to see the contours. Would you help me finish it?"

Me: "Sure. Which colors do you want to use? We have purple, red and green."

Sister Bernice: "It's up to you to choose. Use whatever color pencil you want."

We color.

Me: "I love this pattern. It looks beautiful."

Sister Bernice, after staring at it for a moment: "It looks pretty. Can you now take a pair of scissors and cut it out of this book?"

Me: "Yes, I will do it now, Sister Bernice."

I cut the page out of the book.

Me: "Where do you want me to place it?"

Sister Bernice: "Take it with you. It is yours. You made it beautiful. You deserve it."

I believe heaven is made beautiful by the angels and ordinary people who made others feel extraordinary while they were still alive and now reign on high. Among them is [Sr. Bernice Jordan](#).

Few are the days I spent with her compared to a compact lifetime of impact she spent on Earth, but every conversation I had with her was full of wisdom. I always wanted to spend time with her, even when she would just be silent. She was a sage who would always say something wise in a very concise way and who would keep at heart her observations. She was a fighter who even during her illness fought to get things done, though she was affected by a stroke and would not move much. She spent most of her time organizing her documents, CDs, listening to podcasts and music, praying, and doing physical therapy.

I was always astonished by her courage and her deep understanding of life.

A few weeks before she passed away, I had to travel to Sonoma, and I went to spend time with her and inform her that I would be away for one week. She was in her recliner, awake. I always avoided asking her too many questions, for I knew she struggled to talk, but we talked a bit about her day and the movie she was going to watch later.



(Honorine Uwimana)

I read for her some newsletters and cards she had received. She listened and only interrupted me to give me details of who the sender or the writer would be.

After I was done reading, we talked a bit about me, and when I was ready to leave her room, she held my hand tightly and said: "I had a bad stroke in the past, and it is hard for me to talk. People say that they can hear me, but it is so hard for me."

I did not want her to struggle as she talked, so I told her that I understand and can hear her when she talks. I said it was also fine for her to keep silent when she can't

talk. Then she added: "Thank you for helping Sr. Mary Geneva [Bonhote, one of the sisters running programs at Regina Residence] with all she has to do."

Tears formed behind my eyes as I continued to hold her hand and listen with a heart that wanted to say: "I wish I could do more."

I said goodbye and promised I would read her my writing once I got back. I saw her a couple of times when I returned from my trip. We spent some time together, coloring one of her coloring books. The day I learned her health declined, I was wrapping her Christmas gift, a present I think she never opened: 365 coloring patterns.

I saw her one last time. I prayed for her, and a few days later, on Dec. 28, she entered eternal life while I was away in San Francisco.

Heaven opened its gates; God reached out to her and exchanged the 365 days I wished her to have for eternity.

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She lived a beautiful life. She deserved heaven.

Unfortunately, I never read my pieces to her, and this is one more I won't get a chance to share with her. But during the few times I saw her during the days that were going to be her last on Earth, and during the entire time I sat near her, not knowing exactly what she needed me to do, I prayed that if my presence, my actions or my words couldn't help, that she would only see and feel love. I felt that was all that mattered, and today, she is in the company of love's creator. She deserved it.

She traded a temporary life for eternal life, and today, she rests among the chosen.

I thought I [had said everything about loss](#) and understood all the lessons death has to teach me.

However, it exposed again my vulnerability, taught me to pray for more and revealed to me that eternal life is prepared. For those who please the Lord while on Earth, an everlasting life is deserved, and heaven is guaranteed.



Sr. Bernice Jordan at 6 years old (Honorine Uwimana)

The fault in my prayers was that I prayed for your life,

And you joined in to pray for a life after this life.

I framed a miracle, you schemed heaven,

You were excited about what the trinity had in store for you,

I had my eyes on what favors God could do for me.

I painted a journey to continue,

Your wisdom and presence to rescue, but you sealed the end; you wanted a rest.

I still look again at your small corner in the chapel and wonder what your last conversations were with God. Why could I not interpret the signs?

There were your prayers, and the fault in mine was to ask for less;

indeed, why would he extend your temporal life when he holds eternal life for souls like yours, which gently lived and tenderly loved?

You gave us a last smile and held our hands for a last time

Stayed among us for a final while, then looked up to the angels and said: I am ready for my next.

Archangels opened the gates, saints sang the anthems to your march, and the God you served extended his arms, saying: Well done, faithful servant.

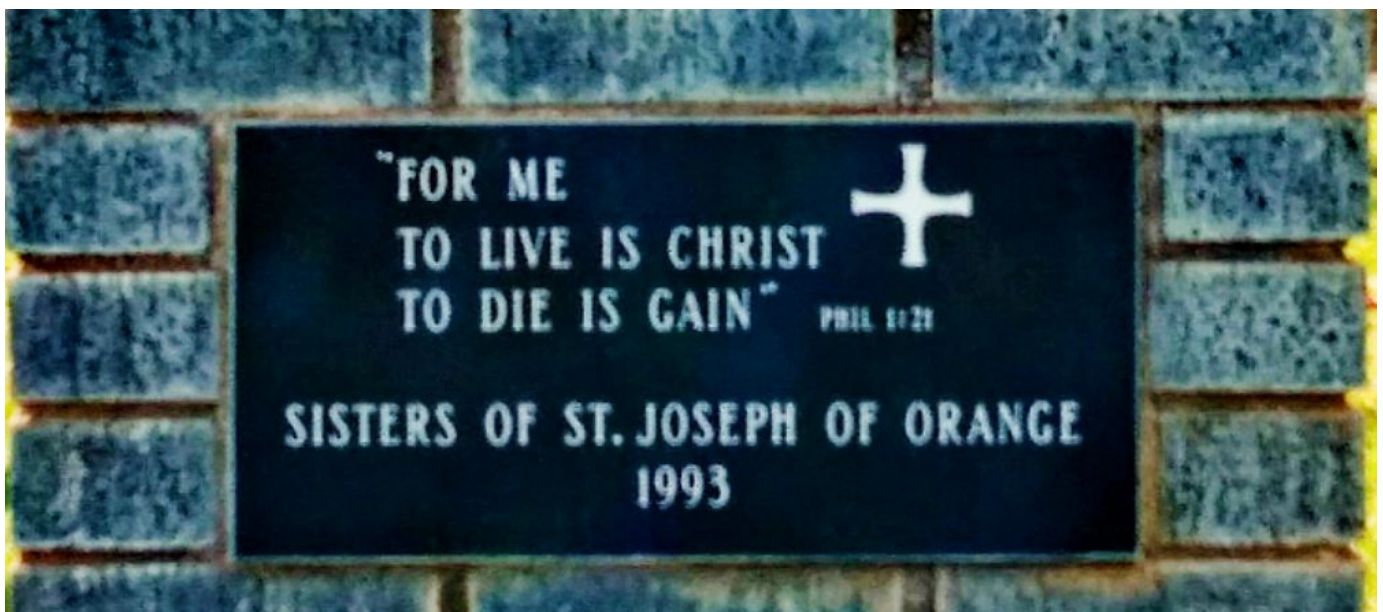
Blessed is the heaven that hosts your beautiful soul,

There will only be one you

One Sr. Bernice Jordan on Earth, for you have set the bar too high for a copy.

But while I am still alive, you will always define a duo of wisdom and perseverance.

I love you, Sr. Bernice Jordan.



Holy Sepulcher Cemetery in Orange, California, where Sr. Bernice Jordan is buried
(Honorine Uwimana)

[Honorine Uwimana is a St. Joseph Worker from Rwanda serving at Regina Residence
with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, California.]

This story appears in the **Notes from the Field** feature series. [View the full series.](#)