

Tim Sullivan Family Life Director

Faith sustained woman rich in spirit but poor in possessions

About a week before Easter, we got a call at the house from our friend, Alice. Her voice was weak and barely audible. She informed us that she was in a local hospice, dying from cancer. A few days later, her daughter and sister from Missouri came here to take her back to Missouri, which is where Alice spent her early life.



For a woman with very little formal education and no money, Alice cut a wide swath through our Diocese. Afflicted with various disabilities and a very troubled past, Alice didn't screen out very many of the impulses that came to her. As a result, those who observed Alice when she attended Mass at Holy Family Cathedral and later at the Church of Resurrection in Tulsa became very much aware of her eccentric ways.

Alice is best known for walking up to people of any age, staring them straight in the face and exclaiming, "I don't like you!" Alice would then pause for a moment, after which she would say in an even louder voice, "I don't like you – because I love you!" emphasizing the word "love."

Alice composed a poem which she called "The Drunken Santa." She indicated that the poem became very popular in Texas and greatly reduced crime there, as people with drinking problems were so embarrassed by the poem that they stopped drinking, which had a corresponding impact on the crime rate. Occasionally, Alice would take up the cause of

spreading "The Drunken Santa" to other states and even other countries by mailing copies of the poem to media outlets and government leaders.

People at our bishop's office came to know Alice quite well, as she was frequently moved to try to get the bishop's attention on "The Drunken Santa" and other issues. She often had questions about religion, and she saw no reason why she shouldn't take her questions right to the top.

Alice had a lively imagination and a great, but often earthy, sense of humor. Probably the best example of this involved a situation in which Alice wanted to cash her monthly disability check.

Not trusting banks, Alice used to take her check to one of those check cashing places that charges a high fee. My wife Connie and I told Alice that if she would endorse her check and go with us to our bank, we could cash her check without any fee being charged.

Well, the first time we tried this, Alice accompanied my wife to her bank next door to Bishop Kelley High School in Tulsa, where Connie works. Alice was nervous and unsure. She was especially worried that the bank would ask for identification and she wouldn't have any. Alice kept fretting over the identification issue. Connie told her not to worry, that everything would work out.

Just as they approached the teller window inside the bank and Connie placed Alice's check on the counter, Alice, who was standing right behind Connie, blurted out, "I've got my

ID!" The next thing Connie knew, Alice had taken out her dentures, which had her name on them somewhere, and plopped them on the counter in front of the teller. The dentures weren't in very good shape. The teller, not having been trained for this type of situation, was momentarily speechless. Recovering only slightly, she mumbled that she wouldn't be needing Alice's identification.

When I learned that Alice was near death from cancer, my first thought was that she had not gotten a single break in life. The more I thought about her, though, I realized that she had gotten the biggest break of all.

Alice, having so little in the world's eyes, had tremendous faith and a beautiful soul. She prayed for hours every day. She loved the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. She loved Mary and all the saints. She loved the Catholic Church. Of the things that really mattered, she had a great abundance. In the spiritual dimension of life, Alice was a lovely, charming princess, very deserving of a crown with many jewels.

I'll miss Alice, but I won't worry about her. I suspect she'll be more than OK. I worry about the rest of us, though, the ones who got more of what the world has to offer and what the world prizes, the ones who are distracted from the truly important things by our pride and our possessions.

Our closing verses are from the Gospel of Matthew: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land."