

October, 1972

Greetings from your Duluth Dominicans!

Praise the Lord for His personal concern for each of His individual creatures! Praise and thank Him too for everyone of you who has made His love and concern manifest in a human way. It is so great to be a Dominican---your prayers, your solicitude has been so comforting at the time of our "shipwreck". For you, we thank Him!

It is truly a Feast of the Holy Rosary that we shall never forget. Truly we feel God suspended every law of nature. We know that some of you have read the letter that Sister Antoninus wrote for her family, but we wanted all of our sisters to have this as a personal letter from each of us, to make known other little miracles that we didn't realize at first.

Monsignor Popesh from St. Michael's has a brother who has a cabin on an island in White Iron Lake up near the Canadian border. The only way to reach it is by boat; there is no means of communication to the island. We, all the Sisters from Holy Rosary School and St. Michaels; left Duluth after school on Friday evening and reached our destination about 6:00 p.m. Monsignor's bachelor brother John was there to transport us in three loads. He was to return the next day at 1:15 so we could get back to Duluth for the 5:00 p.m. Mass for we had Religious Education classes on Sunday A.M. We laughed, we talked, we prayed, we ate, we walked amid God's wonderland untouched by human beings and flooded with the glories of fall leaves, contrasting with the evergreens, white birch, blue skies, brilliant sunshine and shadows on the beautiful lake. Saturday afternoon we had all the luggage packed and were having our last prayer session together on the beach as John's motor boat "putted" into shore. He joined us for the closing hymn and a "Many thanks to you".

We loaded the boat and Sister Mary Josephine, Sister Pauletta, Sister Mary Margaret and Sister Antoninus climbed aboard. John had said we might get a little wet, and it might take a little longer because the lake was a little rough. (The trip normally takes about 7 - 10 minutes.) We laughed and said we wouldn't mind. We hadn't gone far before we knew what he meant, and we laughed heartily as the water sprayed in our faces. Then the waves began to slap our faces as they crashed over the front of the boat, and we became soaked as the boat began to fill with water. It all happened so quickly; the boat must have filled easing us into the water and then capsized. The next thing we knew Sister Antoninus was astride the capsized boat, Sisters Josephine and Mary Margaret were hanging on to the front side of the boat; John was holding on to the back. Sister Pauletta was missing; she had been caught under the boat, the last to surface. When she surfaced she immediately sensed the concern for her. All were afloat and no life jackets. She had come up at the back end of the boat which was weighed down by the motor. We saw the luggage and the gasoline tank float away. Oranges were bobbing on the surface of the water. We realized our plight, but there was never any panic. Maybe the Master didn't calm the stormy waves as He did for the apostles, but He did give us a feeling of great calm and peaceful serenity on the inside. There was such a deep concern for each other. There wasn't any conversation to speak of, but each in her own way and time prayed aloud asking God to save us. We praised Him, we thanked Him, we petitioned Him. When someone would ask, "Are we coming any closer?" Sister Antoninus would assure us we were. We didn't know until later that there were two anchors in the boat each fastened to a twenty-foot rope and when the boat capsized they dropped into the water. We could not have floated anyplace, but that too was providential because the wind was against us, and we would probably have drifted out to a larger and worse part of the lake. We were in the water about 45 minutes. Each was

encouraged to "hang on" a little longer; there was no fear for meeting our God. No one of us knows all that happened. We told God if He were pleased with our work in Duluth to please save us.

Then, Sister Antoninus saw a truck drive up to the shore, and we started calling for help. We know now:

- 1) the wind was against us
- 2) the man has a hearing problem
- 3) it was the first time the couple had binoculars in their car. Coincidence?

Anyway this 63 year old man and his wife were going to go boating; but, when they saw how rough the water was, they decided not to go. Just as they were going back to the truck he asked his wife if she heard anything, and she hadn't. He listened again, then got the binoculars and saw us. They unloaded their boat and came to us. They were able to get Sister Antoninus and Sister Mary Margaret into the boat; but, when they were trying to get Sister Josephine, they realized their own boat was in danger of tipping. They asked John to hang to the capsized boat and Mr. Cersine would hold on to Sister Josephine and Sister Pauletta, and they would pull them through the water as Mrs. Cersine rowed to another island closer to the mainland. They couldn't start the motor; they were afraid they would cut the bodies of Sister Josephine and Sister Pauletta. Mr. Cersine kept calling "Row hard to the left!".

Mrs. Cersine couldn't row hard enough so they exchanged positions. Finally, we reached the island--just as Sister Pauletta went into unconsciousness. All she remembers was the concerned voice of Sister Josephine. How comforting that is when one realizes she has a distorted cramped shivering body and cannot move or communicate. They dragged Sister Pauletta ashore and for a time we huddled together shivering. The Cersines had gone back after John. While they were gone Sister Mary Margaret became sick to her stomach because of the water she had swallowed. Finally she and Sister Josephine went to try to get warmth from the sunshine. Sister Antoninus stayed with Sister Pauletta who wavered from consciousness to unconsciousness. After the Cersines brought John to the island they went for help. Finally they returned with another boat. The two boats took us all to the mainland. Sister Pauletta had to be carried both times. Sister Josephine, during all this had held on to the car keys, the ring of which she had fastened to her finger. The keys to St. Michael's car went to the bottom of the lake but--Sister Marie Michelle luckily (?) had another set with her on the island. Sister Antoninus drove to the hospital; Mrs Cersine went along to give directions. Mr. Cersine stayed to take care of John. We arrived at the hospital shortly after 3:00 and were all taken to emergency. Sister Josephine and Sister Mary Margaret had lost their veils; otherwise we were completely clothed. The nurses cut the clothes from Sister Pauletta, pumped her stomach twice and gave her oxygen. She regained consciousness about 10 minutes to 4:00. The others were checked and treated and clothed in the adjoining room.

Word then came that Mr. Cersine had collapsed on the side of the road with a massive heart attack. John ran into the home of a Mrs. Carl babbling incoherently. Mrs. Carl hailed a passing car to take care of Mr. Cersine. He was brought to the hospital and was in intensive care for two weeks. (He is recuperating, thanks be to God and all the prayers that have been offered for him.) Sister Mary Margaret stayed at the hospital along with Sister Pauletta. Sister Josephine and Sister Antoninus, after calling Monsignor Popesh in Duluth, drove the car back to await and meet the other sisters. Can you see them walking out of the hospital clad in a hospital gown, a hospital robe that came to their knees, cloth slippers and Dominican veils? Monsignor Popesh called his other brother and the two nephews went in another boat to get the other six sisters who had now been on the island for three hours without any word of what had happened. They expected a delay; but, when the boat hadn't returned after 40 minutes, they began to be worried. They suffered as intensely as any one of us.

Sister Martha Mary began saying her rosary silently as the others sat near the pile of luggage. At first no one spoke of her anxiety, but then they came to Sister Martha Mary and suggested they pray the rosary. Sister Marie Michelle got the idea that if they pushed their way through the thicket they might see what was causing the delay. Shortly Sister Marie Michelle came back crying out that all she could see was a capsized boat; no human beings in sight. The silence was ominous. Sister Martha Mary suggested they keep on with the rosaries. Sister Helen Michael opened the Bible to see if a comforting word would be found there. She gasped as she saw and read Hebrews 11:13-16. Then the sisters struggled through the thicket again. They could hear motor boats; the boats were circling the capsized boat--presumably skin divers looking for bodies. By now it was 3:00 p.m. and Sister Martha Mary announced that if no one came by 4:00 p.m. that we would have to try to find the cabin key and get prepared to stay. Then came a welcome sight, a boat rounding the turn into the cove. The two young men were smiling, but we were afraid it was just to give us courage to bear the news. Imagine our relief when they shouted, "Everyone is saved; we've come for you." Even though the wind was calmed by now, they took only two sisters in each load. Sister M. Kristin and Sister Martha Mary were the last to leave the island. About the same time Sister Antoninus and Sister Josephine drove up. Such a welcome! Sister Martha Mary gave her mantle to Sister Josephine and her blue robe to Sister Antoninus.

When they arrived at the hospital you never saw such a reunion. Mrs. Cersine, in spite of her deep concern for her husband, was there as Sister M. Margaret and Sister Pauletta walked out to rejoin the group. She, too, laughed and wept with us. About seven o'clock, reunited, weary, clothed in hospital attire, the two cars started for home. We sang, "Praise Him!", prayed, talked, lapsed into periods of deep grateful silences. Sister Marie Michelle became very nauseated as she drove home and had to remain at Rosary for sometime until she could get the stomach settled. We were ten grateful exhausted sisters as we sank into our beds that night. Words cannot express our innermost feelings. That you must get personally from any of the ten. As Sister Josephine says, "one's values change with such an experience", material things seem so unimportant. We feel almost as if a new life has been given to us, sort of "living on borrowed time".

Mr. Cersine is recuperating nicely. He has received a telegram of commendation from the governor of Minnesota. He is a baptized Catholic but was never raised Catholic. Maybe we could pray one more special gift for him. He thanks and thanks us as if we had done him a favor by letting him save us. She, too, has been so beautiful, never a tinge of bitterness because we came out with not even a cold, and he has had to suffer so much. He is truly a modern Good Samaritan. He could have passed by!

Do you know what drifted ashore? The heaviest piece of luggage which contained a large Jerusalem Bible, an office book, a large candle, and the liturgies we had used. Another coincidence?

God truly has "the whole world in His Hand". How blessed we are that we are His in a special way. Thank you again for all your solicitude and prayers.

Gratefully yours in Him,
The "Duluth" Dominicans

In 1972 the Sisters were still wearing the long habit so it adds to the "miracle". We were all wearing the long habit, a long winter coat, and we had NO life jackets! I don't know about the rest of the sisters, but I, Sister Pauletta, CANNOT swim! I pray that I, we, have fulfilled the reason for which we were saved.