

## Sister John Marie Samaha's Funeral Liturgy

For the past year, I have been visiting lighthouses with a sibling who is interested in photographing them. I have mapped the locations and pretty much just gone along for the ride. I also love to read all the captions in museums and display cases. Sometime this spring I began to consistently notice the phrase "keepers of the light." And at some point I had a theological reflection, thinking that's what we are supposed to be, not the light, but keepers of the light. I had developed such an interest in the lighthouse size, lens, grade and geography, that I forgot it was the lighthouse keepers – many of whom were women - who single-handedly and steadfastly enabled the lighthouse to serve its function; often serving for many years, trimming the wicks, polishing the lens, hauling the oil used in the lamps, and sounding the alarm.

And somehow the image reminded me of Sr. John Marie. When I think of her I am tempted to enumerate the many things she accomplished, and the energy she had for her many ministerial involvements. I could compile a list that went on forever, as can many of you. And if I did that, I would be focusing on the lighthouse and not the importance of the light. I realized when I read the scriptures for this liturgy that they were really all one-liners and very focused:

- Micah says "So do right, love goodness, and walk humbly..."
- Corinthians reminds us, "Faith, hope and love remain, but the greatest of these is love..."
- And Matthew exhorts us to remember that, "whatever you did for one of these least brothers/sisters of mine, you did for me."

These are the words which she kept in focus, which radiated from her core, and which she tended with the faithfulness of any good keeper of the light.



Sometimes in my lighthouse readings I found passages where the keeper said “this is a monotonous and boring job, I even have lost interest in the ships – thank God I have my pastimes” – that certainly would not have been how John Marie looked at all those hospital visits, wakes, vouchers, and catechist training events. (Although it might have been how she viewed glint to meetings!) Another female keeper was known as the “socialite lighthouse keeper” a distinction she earned with her fashionable tastes and involvement in the local social events – now that could have been John Marie!

I think it is very fitting that today is the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord, and conveniently the gospel tells us that Jesus took Peter, John and James up to a high place to pray and while there his face and clothing became dazzling, indeed they were blinded by the light; they saw two men, were overtaken by a cloud and heard a voice which said “This is my chosen Son; listen, to him.” They were called to keep the light in focus, yet they could hardly look upon it.

If we listen today, through our fog of sorrow and joy, we recognize that John Marie was a keeper of the light, a light received at baptism, a light enkindled at profession, a light that cannot be extinguished even by death. This moment in time calls us to be keepers of the light, people who take their duty seriously, who live on the edge of land and sea and often serve in isolation. Quite simply, this celebration in her honor, serves as a reminder to us: keep the source of light burning and bright; make sure that the lens in your life is dazzling, clean, and sharply in focus, and by all means plan on experiencing transfiguration.

Reflection delivered by Sr. Gladys Guenther SHF at Holy Family Motherhouse