



Dearest Sisters,

We received the news that at 10:34 last night (local time), God, the Father of all mercy, visited Juzen Hospital in Hiratsuka, Japan, to call to himself our sister:

**NAGAHAMA AKIKO – SR. M. CELESTE**  
**born in Kumamoto (Fukuoka), Japan, on 10 May 1936.**

This is how Sr M. Celeste recalled the particular moment when the Divine Master drew close to her and called her by name: “I first heard God’s call when I was a high school student,” she said. “I was baptized as an infant and attended church regularly from my earliest years. But my life as a Christian was routine and not very profound. One day, while reading a book on the life of Jesus, I came to the passage recounting the preaching of Jesus in Galilee. Mentally picturing the episode, I suddenly found myself in the midst of the Gospel scene. That instant marked a turning point in my life.”

With a desire to be a herald of the kingdom of God, she entered our Congregation in Fukuoka, Japan, on 30 Nov. 1956. She made her novitiate in Tokyo, concluding it with her first profession on 30 June 1961. While she was still in initial formation, her superiors recognized that this young candidate had a special artistic sensibility and a talent for editing. Because of this, she was assigned to work in the editorial department of the Society of St. Paul, where she was able to perfect her abilities. In 1963, she was transferred to Sendai to carry out itinerant diffusion of the Gospel to families and institutes. Afterward, she went to Tokyo to prepare for her perpetual profession, which she made on 30 June 1967. Following this, she was sent to Nagasaki, where she worked in the book center until she accepted the request to go to Taiwan as a missionary.

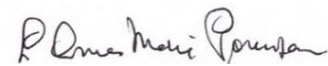
On 26 November 1969, Sr. M. Celeste left her homeland aboard a Chinese ship. Looking back on this period of her life, she described her first impressions of China in this way: “The sisters welcomed me cheerfully,” she wrote, “which surprised me because such enthusiasm was not typical of Oriental greetings. I liked the joyful atmosphere of the community very much. I felt happy and fully welcomed there. Our house in Taipei was sober and serene, and the sisters were very simple and spontaneous. We spoke to each other in many languages, reflecting our diverse backgrounds. Among ourselves, our predominant language was English and, after that, Italian. But we also communicated in Beijingese and sometimes Japanese. At first I found it hard to switch from one language to another, but in this way we at least managed to interact more smoothly with one another.” During her ten years in Taiwan, Sr. M. Celeste carried out the book center apostolate in Taipei and Kaohsiung.

In 1979 she returned to Japan, where she devoted herself to editorial and promotional work. For some time she was engaged in the radio apostolate and catechetical activities. In 1986, she had the opportunity to work at Radio Veritas in the Philippines and in producing Japanese language programs. When she returned to Tokyo, she carried out over the years the editorial and book center apostolates, and also collaborated with the Catholic Mission Research Institute of the Japanese Bishops’ Conference. From 1997 onward, she returned to book center activities in Fukuoka, Osaka, Sendai, Hiratsuka, Hiroshima.

About ten years ago, Sr. M. Celeste’s health began to decline as a result of acute rheumatoid arthritis. Her condition worsened in the following years with the onset of Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s diseases. In 2019, it was necessary for her to be admitted to Juzen Hospital in Hiratsuka. She wrote to her community: “I am sustained by God and am living each day trusting in the strength of your prayers. Please remember me and continue to support me in my weakness.”

Sr M. Celeste had always been deeply moved by the command of Jesus to “remain alert.” We imagine that her heart was always vigilant as she awaited her Bridegroom in the often dark and lonely hours of her preparation for his coming, which have today been transformed into love, intimacy and resurrection as she participates in the eternal wedding feast in heaven.

Affectionately,



*Sr. Anna Maria Parenzan*

Rome, 21 March 2024