

Gifts from my Grandmother



My grandmother, Marion Thuma Snyder Johnston, told me this story many years ago and said that she wanted to write it someday. She passed away peacefully on March 30, 2017. She didn't get a chance to put it into writing, so I'm going to make sure that her story is shared with the world.

When Grandmom was a young girl, her mother told her they were going to deliver some Christmas gifts to poor children in Baltimore, where they lived a modest, but comfortable, life. She adamantly protested, but my great-grandmother dragged her out of the house with bags of toys people had donated to their church, destined for boys and girls who weren't sure if they were going to eat that night. She huffed and puffed all the way there, asking her mother, "What about me? What about my presents?" all the way up to the doorstep of the crumbling East Baltimore rowhome where an embarrassed woman in shabby clothes opened the door. My grandmother peeked past her and saw a gathering of "moppet-headed" children, huddled together to keep warm. Their clothes didn't fit, their faces were dirty, and their eyes were sad and old. As my great-grandmother chatted with the mother, as though she were her next-door neighbor, my grandmother stood there in awe, trying not to cry. "We have some presents for the children," my great-grandmother said. She and my grandmother handed out the packages and watched as the children opened each toy. Joy overcame the room. When my great-grandmother and grandmother left for their modest, but comfortable, home, Grandmom had a new perspective on the life she had and on the life she was called to lead. From that moment forward, gratitude and charity shaped her attitudes and her actions.

Like most grandmothers, Grandmom spoiled her grandkids with time, money, and love. She showed up to piano recitals, First Communions, and St. Patrick's Day parties. She bought us entire wardrobes of the most fashionable clothes for Christmas and gave us money to spend freely for our birthdays (even into adulthood). I'll always cherish our phone conversations and the greeting cards she sent.

My grandmother also offered her generosity to the Church of the Epiphany in

Raspeburg. She helped keep the church beautiful and volunteered for many of the church's charity groups. I remember delivering Meals on Wheels with her and my grandfather. Those experiences were like the one she had with her mother. Every delivery was made with love as though she were serving a dinner she prepared to her own family members.

My favorite gift my grandmother gave me is my mom, who exemplifies those ideals of gratitude and charity. Like her mother, my mom gives and gives and gives. Sometimes I look at myself and think, "How could I be more like my mother and my grandmother? How could I be more thankful for the many things I have? How could I give more of my time, my money, myself?" And then I remember the most important gift they both gave me, faith in Jesus Christ. If I put Him and His people before me as they have, I, too, will live a life of gratitude and charity.