“Something good is to come for these two babies!”

According to Sister Grace Flowers’ twin sister Dorothy, those were the words spoken by a Sister of St. Francis who had cared for the two babies and their mother when the girls were born at St. Francis Hospital in Miami, Florida. The nun had placed the twins on the hospital chapel’s altar when they and their mother were ready to be discharged, and made that fateful prediction.

Dolores, the future Sister Grace, and Dorothy were born on December 16, 1929, to John and Mary (Hatton) Flowers. They were the youngest of John and Mary’s four children; first came Catherine, then Margaret, then the twins. Only three years separated all the girls, and with them being so close in age they did many things together. Sadly, however, Catherine died in 1937 just before her eleventh birthday.

The Great Depression was just getting under way when the twins were born, but “we were not poor because we always owned our own home and had a car,” Grace said in her autobiography, “but we did not have unnecessary things. Mother worked as a registered nurse and my father always had a job.” In Grace’s application to enter the Congregation, she listed John’s job as supervisor for the Miami Transit Company.

Dorothy and Dolores attended public school from grades one through four, until the parish, St. Mary’s, opened its school, and both girls completed their elementary and secondary schooling there. Dolores then enrolled at Barry College (University), which is how she first came into contact with the Adrian Dominican Sisters. She had thought about religious life off and on already, but when she observed the way the Dominicans lived their community life, she knew it was the Congregation for her.

Interestingly, Dorothy had simultaneously been in her own process of discernment, which led her to the Sisters of St. Joseph who had taught at St. Mary’s. “It became a natural thing to think of a vocation to religious life as it was nurtured in us from the time we were quite young. Sister Grace and I never spoke to each other about our discernment," Dorothy said. "It was not a twin thing, but a personal, individual call."

When Dolores talked with her parents about religious life, she wanted to leave for Adrian in a matter of just weeks. John and Mary were not opposed to her decision, but asked her to wait until September to give all of them the summer together. As it so happened, both the girls entered their respective communities on the same date: September 8, 1948.

Sister Grace Alexis Pasek at Barry helped Dolores with her discernment and the initial process for entering. Grace died before Dolores entered, however, and when Dolores was received as a novice in August 1949, she took the name Sister Grace Alexis in honor of the sister who had been such a help to her.

Grace made first profession on August 5, 1950, and was missioned to St. Alphonsus School in Dearborn, Michigan. Subsequent assignments took her to St. Jude, Detroit (1951-53); St. Mary, Fort Walton Beach, Florida (1953-58); and St. Anastasia, Fort Pierce, Florida (1958-60), where she taught both elementary and high school.
She earned her bachelor’s degree in secretarial science from Siena Heights College (University) in 1953 and her master’s in educational administration from Barry in 1958. She later earned a Specialist in Education degree in Business Education from the University of Georgia (1979) and a master’s degree in pastoral studies from Loyola University, New Orleans (1988).

Grace was sent to Rosarian Academy in West Palm Beach, Florida, in 1960 to serve as a teacher in the high school and to be the Academy’s treasurer. In 1963 she became Rosarian’s principal.

After three years in that role, she was selected to be a councilor in the St. Rose of Lima Province, and served for four years as secretary-treasurer. From 1970-73, she was provincial secretary.

Once her term in that position ended, she went to Barry to teach business education. That position only lasted for one academic year, however, because the General Council elected in 1974 appointed her to fill the position of Secretary General. Her offer in 1978 to remain in that post when the new General Council came into office was gratefully accepted by the Council-elect, and she continued to serve until August 1980.

At that point, she went to work in Jacksonville, Florida, for the Marriage Tribunal Office of the Diocese of St. Augustine, as its executive secretary. It so happened that for part of that time her twin sister was also missioned in Jacksonville, working as the activities director of All Saints Nursing Home where their mother lived then, and they were able to spend time together.

Grace was in Jacksonville for eight years until her election as Florida Chapter Prioress in 1988. When her term was completed in 1994, she went back to Barry and spent the rest of her active ministerial life there, first as assistant director and student advisor for the school of adult and continuing education at the Port St. Lucie Campus (1994-96) and then as director and later associate director at the Treasure Coast Campus (1996-2012), where she also worked with adult students.

She continued to live in Port St. Lucie for a time after her retirement and then in 2016 moved to West Palm Beach to live at Casa Maria, on the Rosarian campus, with several other sisters. During that time, the Adrian Dominicans in South Florida had the experience of riding out Hurricane Irma in September 2017. Grace evacuated to a special-needs shelter because she was on oxygen, and the Global Sisters Report of September 14, 2017, carried an extensive report on the storm from the point of view of the Adrian Dominicans involved which included a photo of Grace at the shelter ministering to a distraught elderly woman.

Grace’s health ultimately declined to the point that she needed to return to Adrian to live, and she did so in 2018. She died at the Dominican Life Center on March 13, 2019, at the age of eighty-nine.

At her wake service on March 17, Sister Pat Dulka, Co-Chapter Prioress of the Holy Rosary Chapter, noted that Grace’s autobiography included an eight-page list of all the blessings of her life, including the people who had touched her. The autobiography concluded with a section titled “How I want to be remembered” that included being born into a loving family, having a close relationship with the Sisters of St. Joseph since the age of six, being someone who loved and lived her commitment to the Congregation … and for remembering the opening words of the Rule of St. Augustine, which for many years was the Friday table reading.

Her twin sister sent in a remembrance for the wake, some of which has been used as historical background in this profile. Dorothy’s own health issues precluded her travel to Adrian, but she was able to speak to Grace by phone just before Grace’s passing. Her remembrance included memories of their growing up together, their coincidentally almost-identical calls to religious life, and Grace’s
visits to the convent where Dorothy was living in retirement — always bearing a homemade poppy seed cake for the sisters and their maintenance man, David.

Dorothy went on to note that she and her sister had long spoken every night on the phone “to express our love for each other and to say goodnight.

“… I am blessed with memories and images that create a place of connection that cannot be taken away. God has always blessed Sister Grace and me during our lives as consecrated religious women, and I trust He will always do so until it is my time to be called home to be with my parents and sisters.

“Until then, I have to say, ‘I love you, Grace — good night.’”

Grace's niece Roseann Minnet also shared her memories of her aunt. “I love her because she taught me the great lesson of remembering every day what is important,” Roseann said. “She was always the first to remember the really important things — her family, her friends and so many in need. She always took the time to do and to say the simple things that by remembering meant so very much to us all.”

Sister Pat Walter preached the homily for Grace’s funeral the next morning. “Few people are so well named as Grace Flowers (I realize that her parents named her Dolores, but I always knew her as Grace), for she was truly a gracious, hospitable, thoughtful and generous woman who loved the beauty of her native Florida, with its nuanced changes of seasons,” Sister Pat said.

She went on to explore each of the themes Grace herself had wanted her to convey. First was the reading from Ecclesiastes (3:1-8) which Grace chose as the first reading, emphasizing that everything has its own time and season. “She knew the time to keep had passed and the time to let go had come,” she said. “… Now it can truly and fully be said of her, ‘Grace flowers.’”

Next was the experience of being a twin. “For Grace, diversity and unity, identity and otherness were not warring opposites nor causes for fear,” Pat said. “In her life, in her experience, they were complementary dimensions of the same reality: twinship. This, she believed, was a necessary message and profound witness in a world so full of competition, polarization, and fear.”

Pat then reflected on Jesus’ message of inclusivity in Mark 3:31-35: “Grace, too, made that move from her family of origin to her religious community to the people with whom she worked and whom she served, finding and extending kinship. Grace invites us to take the image of twinship and extend it to our approach to others, seeing them as deeply connected at the same time we reverence their individuality.

“… Grace flowers among us. Grace flowers. And we gather in faith and hope that we, too, will fully flower with Grace.”
Left: The Flowers sisters are, from left, twins Dorothy and Dolores (Sister Grace), Margaret, and Catherine

From left: Sister Grace Flowers, left, with Sister John Norton Barrett, 2009. From left, Sisters Marie Grace Gibney, Grace Flowers, and Jean Marie Sheridan on Reception Day, August 4, 1949

Sister Grace Flowers, left, with Sister Mary Pat Dewey, 1991. Members of the 2009 Diamond Jubilee Crowd are: back row, from left, Sisters Aileen McClain, Geraldine Megel, Mary Elizabeth Crimmins, Grace Flowers, Jean Marie Jeziolkowski, and Madeline Mary Dervin, and front row, from left, Sisters Thomas James Burns, Anastasia McNichols, Frances Barfield, Jane Irene Hutton, and Donna Markham (Prioress).