

AN HOUR WITH JULIA GREELEY

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First Edition

Opening Prayer with Julia Greeley

Spirit of Wisdom, help me spend the next hour or so in the company of Julia Greeley, Denver's Angel of Charity, and enable me to open my mind and heart in union with hers to the overwhelming love Jesus' Sacred Heart has for each of us. May I then consider ways in which I can better join Julia in bringing the love of Jesus to all the people I encounter. Amen.

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The Spiritual Biography of Julia Greeley

Servant of God Julia Greeley was born into slavery at the Samuel B. Caldwell plantation in the community of Woodland, MO, in Marion County sometime between 1833 and 1848. The exact date of her birth is unknown. When asked her age, she replied, "I don't know. I never was told."

Before being freed near the end of the Civil War, Julia labored for about nine years as a cook and nanny for Dr. Paul G. Robinson and his wife, Lina, who was a member of the prominent Pratte family of St. Louis. While working for the Robinsons, Julia met and became friends with Lina's sister, Julia Pratte Dickerson, a widow with four children who later married William Gilpin, the former first territorial governor of Colorado. The couple

moved to Denver. In the late 1870s, Julia followed to perform caretaker services for the Gilpin family.

Gov. Gilpin's wife, a devout Catholic, helped Julia enter the Catholic Church. Julia was baptized in 1880 at Sacred Heart Jesuit parish on Larimer Street in Denver. Julia threw herself wholeheartedly into the life of that parish, becoming an active member of the Sacred Heart League and its companion, Apostleship of Prayer. Julia soon became a daily communicant who also fasted regularly. Her parish priest often asked if she had eaten breakfast, and her common reply was: "My Communion is my breakfast."

In 1901, the Servant of God joined the Secular Franciscan Order. For the remainder of her time on earth, Julia made the gospel her way of life. Upon her death she was buried in a Franciscan habit. Reflecting on her being thus clad, her friend, Jesuit Fr. Eugene Murphy said: "Here was the secret of her influence: She had taken Christ literally, as had the Poverello of Assisi [St. Francis]. Like him, she had given

away all to the poor and had gone about making melody in her heart unto the Lord.”

Upon leaving the employment of the Gilpins, Julia worked for various families in Denver and other front-range communities as a domestic servant, cooking, cleaning, and caring for the children, mostly in Denver, but also briefly in Cheyenne and Laramie in Wyoming; Fort Logan and Edgerton in Colorado; and Cimarron in New Mexico. Whatever money was left after providing for her own needs, Julia spent caring for Denver's forgotten poor by sharing food, clothing, fuel, and anything else they needed. She generally delivered them in a little red wagon or gunnysack, but she once was seen hauling a mattress on her back. In order to avoid embarrassing the recipients of her charity, this “one-woman Vincent de Paul Society,” as one editor called her, made her deliveries mostly at night and through dark alleys.

Julia also devoted much of her time each month to spreading the literature of the Apostleship of Prayer and the Sacred Heart League all over Denver. Since she was illiterate, one has to