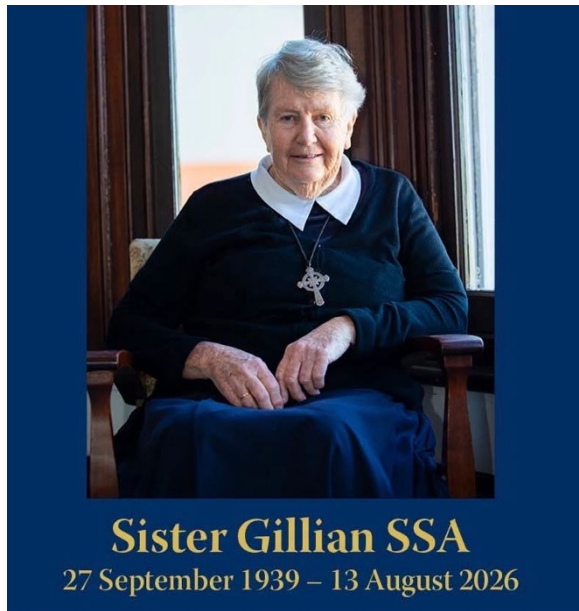


**Sermon for the Funeral Service of  
The Revd Sr Gillian Gardiner, Society of the Sacred Advent  
St Johns Cathedral Brisbane  
Friday 4 September 2026  
Dr Murray Harvey**



Psalm 139

- 1 *O LORD, you have searched me and known me.*
- 2 *You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.*
- 3 *You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.*
- 4 *Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O LORD, you know it completely.*
- 5 *You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.*
- 6 *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.*
- 7 *Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?*

As humans, we strive to know many things. We want to know about ourselves, the behaviour of others, life on earth, the universe. We seek knowledge. With knowledge we can control. Knowledge is power.

But for the psalmist it's not *what* we know that's important.

The psalm draws us into a mystery. A mystery that throws us off balance.

I think my life is shaped by my knowledge, by its achievements; held back by its limitations.

But actually it's *Gods knowledge of me* is all that is important.

God knows us fully. This is something to wonder at and rejoice in.

Glimpsing this mystery, Gods knowledge of us, allows to flow –

wonder, awe, delight, and a desire to serve.

As I've been preparing this sermon over the past week or so, I've been overwhelmed by a feeling that whatever I say, or we say, in response to this life of prayer and service of The Revd Sr Gillian SSA, will be somehow inadequate.

An Inadequate expression of our grief, and a falling short of the gratitude due for this religious life so fully lived for God.

It occurred to me look back at the vows that Gillian would have made when she made her profession all those years ago, and by which she has lived ever since.

The Episcopal Visitor to the Society at the time, asked her:

*Sister, what do you seek?*

Her answer: *I ask Gods grace, and Liberty to dedicate myself to God by profession of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience within the SSA .....for I believe God calls me, and that his grace is sufficient for me.*

A life freely lived, in and through Gods grace, in response to Gods call.

For the next four decades, Gillian lived by, and rejoiced in, the Philosophy and values of the Sisters of the Society of the Sacred Advent.

She saw this philosophy, and these values, as gifts to be enjoyed by the sisters, but also by the school communities of St Aidans and St Margarets, and also, by the wider Anglican community.

I'm not sure how well you knew Sr Gillian but even if you only knew her a little bit you'd probably know that it wasn't easy to say "no" to her. She was in no way co-ercive or pushy, but if she asked you, in her gentle way, to do something, you knew that she had already prayed about this, and given the matter much careful thought and reflection.

On reflection, I can't remember ever having said no to her!

She knew that unless we changed the Constitution of the SSA to allow for different forms of vowed membership, the order would come to an end after the last professed sisters had all gone. She was convinced that the SSA had much to offer and she took decisive steps to secure a new future, which involved getting me and others to join her in enabling this to happen.

Her approach to this was, in itself, a living out the SSA values and philosophy – I can name at least three here: adaptation to new challenges, humility, courageous hard work.

If she was here now she'd be saying to me, Bishop Murray, it was a team effort!

And it was.

But she was the gentle (and astute) driving force, guided at all times by her prayerful reflection every step of the way; Conscious of Gods vocational call on the SSA to respond to this new challenge.

Thanks to Sr Gillian this is not the funeral of the SSA. It could easily have been.

It may be the funeral of the last professed sister, *for the time being* – but there may be more professed sisters in the future because that provision is

still there. And we continue as an order with our current vowed sisters and companions.

But in many ways it is the end of an era, and the sadness can be overwhelming.

In our grief and in our uncertainties about what the future might hold, we may wish to hide in despair, or (as imagined by the psalmist) take the wings of the morning to some far away place, retreating into our thoughts or darkenesses.

*V7. But where **can** I go from your spirit, or where can I flee from your presence?*

No matter what our grief, we have not escaped God - our being is not lost in separation from God – who is still with each of us here today, and with the SSA. We are all, as individuals and as a community, *fully known by God...*

*Whose hand will lead us, and whose right hand will hold us fast. (V10).*

May this release in us - wonder and awe - and an openness to Gods call.  
May we dedicate ourselves freely, through grace, to Gods service.

As we reflect on Gillian's example and look to the future course of our own Christian journeys and to the future of the SSA, we'll might we say ...

*Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;  
Take my moments and my days,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise,*

*Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
At Thy feet its treasure-store.  
Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, only, all for Thee,*

The Revd Sr Gillian SSA Requiescat in pace

