

Jeanne Miceli, OP
Reflections at Wake Service, October 31, 2011

The poet Mary Oliver asks the question: *What will you do with your one precious life?*

We don't have to look too far to point to Jeanne's accomplishments. She was an educator to her fingertips – a teacher on the elementary and secondary levels and a principal/administrator on the elementary level. Jeanne loved the association with students, parents and faculty and their collaborative efforts for the total education of the students who came under her care. Jeanne was not only efficient but she was focused on her task. And she did it all with integrity and wisdom and an irrepressible wit.

In preparing these comments, I recalled a saying posted by S. Marie Kennedy at St. Thomas Aquinas College when as young sisters we were taking courses in preparation for our teaching ministry. *"Those who instruct others unto justice shall shine as the stars for all eternity."* Perhaps when you want to connect with Jeanne, a glance at the heavens on a starry night might help.

Within the congregation, Jeanne served on many boards, committees and task forces; she attended chapters, assemblies, clusters, and theology circles related to the ongoing life of our congregation and our efforts to be prophetic witnesses pursuing a ministry for justice. Jeanne brought her reasoned opinions and love for the congregation to these gatherings.

But Jeanne's precious life was more than her accomplishments in Warwick, Hicksville, Wyckoff, Middletown, Chester, Bardonia, Ramsey, the Bronx or Sparkill. Jeanne the person was continuing to grow in her relationship to the God who invited her to Sparkill in 1966 and to whom she chose to commit herself. As is true with

most of us, this journey was not without its hurdles and its questioning. Nevertheless, it was always a walk in fidelity.

I've gotten to know Jeanne well over the past six years as she was experiencing some significant changes or transitions in her life. One was the loss of her brother Sal. Jeanne and Sal were very close. She spoke fondly of his looking out for her as they grew up – and especially when she was a teenager who was testing the limits with her Italian mother and father. (This is not meant to be a racial slur but Jeanne shared some of the expectations of a daughter, especially an only daughter, growing up in an Italian home.)

Another change that affected Jeanne deeply was her mother's declining health and need to move from her apartment at Dowling Gardens to Buckingham Manor Nursing Home. Jeanne had the help of family and friends in undertaking this move. Jeanne visited her mother regularly. And when she wasn't able, her many friends filled in for her.

When things seemed to be going better in Jeanne's life, she received the diagnosis of life-threatening illness. She had lots of questions of God and made God aware of the wide range of emotions she experienced. Her world suddenly had to shift its focus to the hospital visits, the chemo treatments, the MRI's and other procedures/tests. During this time Jeanne lived with fear tempered by hope, moments of setbacks and moments when the light at the end of the tunnel seemed brighter. She was cooperative with her treatment and courageous in giving all of herself to the process. During this time Jeanne was overcome with the outpouring of love from many among you who were her chauffeurs, and other caregivers, and the many whose cards and notes of support continued to arrive daily.

If there was any good news for Jeanne during these transition times she learned that she was not alone in

walking this difficult road. In addition to the faithful God on whom she relied, she had the love and support of her family – her sister-in-law Kathy and Kathy and Sal’s children, her nieces Diane, Christine, Lynn and Michelle and their families who continued to open their hearts and their homes to her. And she had the support of many good friends who made the letting go to a new life easier. A doctor at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center commented this past week that he has known very few people who have gone through life with as much support as he witnessed being offered to Jeanne.

Jeanne came to understand her illness as an invitation to go deeper, to probe beneath the surface. Healing for Jeanne came in the form of acceptance of the reality that there was nothing more that could be done for her. She made this reality easier for those who were at the hospital at that moment by asking to see each of us individually for a brief word of thanks and goodbye!

Jeanne is now one of us who has moved on to be with all the saints whose spirits remain in our midst. It is no coincidence that her funeral liturgy will be celebrated tomorrow, the Feast of All Saints.

We have much to be grateful for that Jeanne’s one precious life was lived where we have lived. May her legacy of fidelity to her God and her preaching by her life continue to challenge us for many years to come.

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