

Reflections given by Sr. Aileen Donovan on November 11, 2011 at the funeral mass for Sr. Jeanne Miceli.

One of the poems of the great poet Rilke reads,  
I live my life in widening circles  
That reach out across the world  
I may not ever complete the last one  
But I give myself to it.

I circle around God, that primordial tower...

We only have to glance around the chapel this morning to see how true those words are to Jeanne's life. (Take a moment to look around at the sampling of the wide circles of Jeanne's life.)

In 1945 Jeanne began her journey in the small circle of family with her parents Marianne and Frank and her brother, Sal. Of course, in true Italian fashion, she had many aunts, uncles, and cousins, some of whom are with us today.

Not too many years later the family circle grew to include Sal's wife Cathy, whom Jeanne referred to as "my sister more than my sister-in-law". Over the next few years her four nieces Diane, Christine, Lynne, and Michelle entered the picture. (To her nieces) I hope the many times you have heard your names yesterday and today, have shown you how deep was Jeanne's love and pride in you.

I have in my hand a photo that Jeanne sent to me in CA. It is of herself, her oldest grandniece Justine and her second grandniece, new born Marissa. On the back Jeanne wrote, "Can you believe Justine? She is going to be 9 on February 21. She loves Marissa." Today Justine is with us, a lovely young woman teaching special education and Marissa is nearly 16. Lauren, Jenna, Jack and Alex followed and just this past August Jeanne delighted in traveling to Ohio with Bernadette and Mary to meet her newest grandniece, Emma. Michelle, you will have to let Emma know one day that she brought great joy to Jeanne's life. Just the day before Jeanne went into the hospital she was showing pictures of Emma to my sister. Family brought profound joy to Jeanne's life.

From family, Jeanne's circle grew to include friends. Two faithful friends from elementary days, Stephanie and Elizabeth are here today.

Jeanne fed on friendship. And always as the circle grew, the tower, God remained at the center of her life.

In 1966 Jeanne entered the Sparkill Dominican Congregation with Peggy, Dottie, Mary and me. The circles of her life continued to widen through community and ministry. She loved being and educator and flourished in that work for over forty years as her circles widened to Orange County, Rockland, Long Island, the Bronx and New Jersey.

Jeanne had the capacity to gather and hold friendships wherever she went. Even the doctors who cared for her were brought into the circle of her friendship. In these last months of Jeanne's life, she was often overcome by how wide the circle of love – how much was given back to her.

There were things Jeanne missed, like how courageous she was these past eight months. I once asked her if one year ago she would have believed she would handle this illness so well. Her answer was a definite, "No." She said, "People say I'm brave – what else could I do."

Like all of us, Jeanne was not perfect, simply human. She laughed; (Who of us will ever forget that laugh.) she cried. She shared her gifts and she grappled with those parts of herself that needed healing or forgiveness. Until the end of her life, she sought wholeness. And always she circled around that primordial tower, God.

Jeanne said more than once that her faith was simple and when I asked her recently about her image of the next life, she responded, "I imagine I will first see God and my father and Sal, followed by all the others whom I have loved."

Last Monday when Jeanne received word that she would not recover from the infection in her body, it was that tower, at the center of her life that allowed her, after the initial shock, to move outward with her first thought, her mother, and then with Mary's help she called Cathy and each of her nieces to speak her love for them. She then did the same for each of us, more than ten, who were at the hospital with her. Those were her last words. She would not complete the last circle but gave herself to it. As today's reading from John tells us – Jeanne did not know what she will become but her hope was strong.

In closing, I would like to read a poem adapted by another woman who died all too soon.

When I die, if you need to weep  
Cry for your brother or sister  
Walking the street beside you.  
And when you need me, put your arms around anyone  
And give them what you need to give me.

I want to leave you something  
Something better than words or sounds,

Look for me in the people I've known and loved  
And if you cannot give me away  
At least let me live in your eyes and not on your mind.

You can love me most by letting hands touch hands  
By letting bodies touch bodies in warm embraces  
And by letting yourself be free from worry and sadness.

Love doesn't die  
So when all that's left is love  
Give me away  
Please, give me away.

Jeanne we will now bring your body to be buried on that holy hill behind Sacred Heart Chapel. We reluctantly give you back and we will give you away knowing in the great paradox of our faith, that as we let you go, you remain with us. You will always be with us Jeanne. We love you.