

Marilyn Drummond Aylward

Miss Drummond arrived for the first time at St. Therese Grade School, 58th & Michigan, at the same time I did. She was 19. I was 5. She taught my brother John's second grade class that year. My parents were in their late 30s, and I can only imagine what went through their minds at the first parent-teacher conference when they realized that John's teacher was only 12 years older than he was.

Miss Drummond became my second grade teacher. She developed my reading, writing and religion. I still have copies of three Silent Reading Tests that she graded. My scores on these three are all excellent, which probably explains why my parents didn't keep the others. By second grade I had gathered enough experience in education to know that Miss Drummond was an excellent teacher. She was lively, funny, and smart. She cared about the lessons, and she cared about you. We all liked her; memories of my second-grade year are all happy. All of them. I never forgot her, but I lost track of Miss Drummond, so you can imagine my surprise when, two years ago, as I began work as pastor of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, I walked into the building Saturday afternoon and saw sitting in a front pew near the altar the lady I had called Miss Drummond: Now Mrs. Aylward, and, well, Marilyn. She said, "Father, I'm glad you're here." I told her, "You've known me all my life; you can call me Paul." She was having none of that. I gave up; I learned not to argue with my teachers.

Last week her niece called. "Aunt Marilyn is in the hospital and wants you to visit." I said OK. She said, "D'you want to talk with her?" "Sure." Marilyn picked up the phone and in a strong, lively voice announced, "I want you to do my funeral." Her voice was clear, so I was thinking, "Do you realize you have to die first?" She seemed immortal to me. "I want you to give me last rites," she said. I went to the hospital that afternoon, still feeling like a second-grader. She was in ICU, hooked up to machines, but those were the only clues that she was sick. Her head was clear, her voice strong, her lust for life overflowing. She renewed her baptismal promises, and I gave her viaticum. "I love being Catholic," she said. But she loved everything. She loved her family, she loved golf, she loved her friends, and she loved Ed. She loved being alive eight years after a cancer diagnosis. You wouldn't know it from her demeanor, but Marilyn suffered.

The Book of Wisdom says, "The souls of the just are in the hand of God and no torment shall touch them.... They are in peace.... Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed." The Book of Revelation says, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.... Let them find rest from their labors, for their works accompany them." These words comfort us today. Marilyn followed Jesus, the way, the truth and the life, all her days. She was more than a disciple; she was an apostle. She loved the Church and she wanted you to love it too. She taught for 17 years, which is not a long career in the classroom, but she taught us all in the many other classrooms of life.

After I gave Marilyn last communion last week, I said, "You helped prepare me for my first communion." "I did?" she asked. She thought for a moment and said, "Then I guess I did something right in my life." We all know she did more than that. She inspired us by her love, laughter and care. We pray today that her works will accompany her into one of the rooms in the Father's dwelling place, where Christ has gone to prepare a place for her, and where we hope one day to follow, good students of a great teacher.

Friday, June 21, 2019