

Mary Ann was all about care. She cared for her husband. She cared for her daughters. She cared for the rest of her family. She cared a lot about her faith, nourished it and shared it with others. Throughout her 25-year career she cared about the patients she served through the lab. We think of hospitals as places where people who are sick go to get well. But they are places of intense struggles between illnesses and therapies, each side wielding considerable power against the other. As in any struggle, sometimes those who are there to defend and protect others themselves fall weak during the battles they wage. We don't know how Mary Ann got her infection. But she would not hesitate to put her life at risk if it meant the chance to save the life of someone else. She trusted it was the right thing to do.

We profoundly believe the same about our lives in God. We are at risk every day, but if we act with justice, we have no fears. As the Book of Wisdom says, "the souls of the just are in the hands of God, and no torment shall touch them." In times of distress, many people find it hard to believe that "The Lord is kind and merciful," but we believe that this is true beyond our comprehension. Even when we suffer, we can experience the kindness of God. His mercy frequently comes to us mediated by close family members and care-givers in hospitals.

Sometimes people take extraordinary means of self-sacrifice to show us God's mercy. Saint John experienced this in his own community when he addressed the mystery of human love in his first letter. He did not sugarcoat love: True love is more than a passing flutter. It requires sacrifice. How can you really be in love unless you are willing to sacrifice for someone, to die to yourself? Saint John writes, "we have passed from death to life because we love." Therefore, the best example of love came from Jesus Christ, who not only suffered but died so that we might have life. Saint John writes of Jesus, "The way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us." Then he adds, rather ominously, "so we ought to lay down our lives for [others]." Christianity is serious business. Mary Ann understood that.

Most of us derive a sense of satisfaction when we give care to others. When we hear Jesus' checklist in the parable of the sheep and goats, we can proudly put a mark by most of them: We've given food and drink to the hungry and thirsty either at our tables at home or in community collections of canned goods. We've given up our used clothing too. We've welcomed strangers into our neighborhoods; we know how good it feels when we're the stranger and somebody welcomes us. On the whole, we've probably each done pretty well on caring for people in need. We may not have visited a prisoner, and we have not yet laid down our life for anyone else. But that's the kind of disciple Jesus wants to have following him.

Today we look back on Mary Ann's life with amazement at the way she cared - all through her life, even unto death. We pray today that Christ will gaze upon her soul and find in her a true disciple. May Christ help each of us live the serious business he taught.