

Maryanne Esteban

Maryanne entered a nursing home because she could no longer take care of herself. At least, that's what it seemed. Now we know she entered a nursing home so she could keep taking care of everyone else. Maryanne was an ombudsman with the Kansas Department of Aging and active with AARP—not to receive benefits, but to champion the rights of seniors, especially latinos.

A dreadful list of comorbidities afflicted her body and mind. But they never obstructed her optimism or altruism. She learned everyone's name, even at the nursing home. She cared about people and made a lively conversation partner. Maryanne grew up in a Catholic family, went to Catholic schools, and kept the church at the center of her life, where it influenced her faith, her personality and her work.

Maryanne made other people better people, beginning with Bill. We are accustomed here to see Bill as an active, generous pillar of this cathedral community. That would not have happened without Maryanne. She was the one who nourished his faith. She was the one who suggested he assist as an adult altar server. She was the one who inspired his desire to give. Even though few people from cathedral parish saw her in recent years, she contributed mightily to the heartbeat and mission of our community.

Maryanne did all this under the most extreme physical and mental pains. She called it ozone pain on days it went completely off the scale. A lot of us falsely assume our bodies are sound and will last forever. Maryanne had no delusions. She inhabited the type of human body Saint Paul described in his First Letter to the Corinthians. Paul had undergone hardships: he was beaten, stoned, shackled, shipwrecked, abandoned, and suffered a particular physical or emotional illness that gave us the expression “a thorn in the side.” Paul knew both the fragility and destination of the human body when he called it corruptible and mortal: “Behold,” he says, “I tell you a mystery.... That which is corruptible must clothe itself with incorruptibility, and that which is mortal must clothe itself with immortality.... Then the word that is written shall come about: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’”

For all the pain that Maryanne endured, and all the joy she brought to others, it comforts us to recall how Jesus spoke of his mission: He said, “the hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.... The hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life.”

Maryanne's hearing was good. She heard the voice of the Son of God, and she would surely have us listen to it as well. Maybe like me, you doubt you could have turned the same challenges into blessings as Maryanne did. The memory of her deeds will ever inspire others to listen to the voice of the Son of God and to let pain be swallowed up in victory. Today we pray for the repose of her soul, for her share in the resurrection of Christ, for the immortal clothing of her body. Let us also strive to set aside our pain and imitate her determination to use our days to make other people better people and to champion the rights of others.

Monday, March 1, 2021