

Marilou Finan
January 8, 1943-October 1, 2008
Funeral Liturgy on October 6, 2008
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan

On the day of her baptism Marilou put on Christ.
In the day of Christ's coming, may she be clothed in glory.

The first time I met Marilou, I had gone into Gatherings to look for a gift. As fate would have it, or more probably the Holy Spirit, Miss Chickie was also there, and she introduced me to Marilou and Danielle. There must have been some mention of my Roman Catholic roots or my status as an alumna of the Academy of St. Elizabeth in Convent Station, because before I knew it Marilou and Danielle had launched into a spirited rendition of "Hail, Holy Queen," followed by a chorus of "Mary, Queen of the May." That day was the beginning of a beautiful friendship....

Some people attend a funeral because they **knew** the "dearly departed." I'm going to go out on a limb here to say that you're here not only because you **knew** but because you **loved** Marilou. To know her was to love her, unless you were on the opposite side of an argument from her, in which case she probably ended up winning the argument, and you ended up liking her in the process.

This sanctuary is full because Marilou was an exceptional human being and a good, good friend to so very many people.... You who are related to her by blood, including her brothers Bernard and Paul, her cousins, nieces and nephews, great-nieces-and-nephew who knew her as Ru-Ru, have always had to share her with all the others she adopted as part of her family. Who among us could walk into Gatherings without being introduced to yet another friend, family member, classmate, or Sister of Charity, we'd heard stories about along the Way? Marilou was a web-weaver, a kin-keeper, a spinner of relationships among people. She was continually piecing together an heirloom quilt made up of colorful, disparate patches of fabric from various people's lives.

The heartwarming, eloquent obituary “Denise the niece” wrote for Marilou, highlighted some of her professional accomplishments as teacher, saleswoman, business owner. What she’ll be remembered for longest won’t be her million dollar year selling real estate, though, or her two or four million dollar years selling boats. Instead, she’ll be remembered as the irrepressible, impossibly generous woman who insisted a sad customer on her way to a cemetery pause for a glass of wine in the shop at 11 a.m., who allowed a young bride a full year to pay off a special purchase, who often served more as mother than employer to her staff, and who took tenants under her wing as tenderly as if they were chicks. If we multiplied the number of people in this sanctuary by ten, we still wouldn’t be approaching the number of random acts of kindness Marilou performed in this life, quietly, behind the scenes, with that twinkle in her eye. We can only imagine the volume of stories Danielle and other family members heard yesterday about the ways Marilou touched people’s lives with love and much laughter.

In tandem with Danielle, Marilou offered some of the best hospitality in town. Depending on the day, Marilou would offer a glass of merlot or Danielle would brew a cup of chamomile tea for the lucky visitor. We could not ask them how **they** were doing without being asked how **we** were doing. We knew we had an indefatigable cheering team in Marilou and Danielle, friends who would faithfully weather any storm, mount any defense, or scale any height for us. How blessed we are to still have Danielle....

In her twenties, Marilou became a Sister of Charity. Probably even if she hadn’t been assigned to the laundry in the novitiate, that would have proved to be a time-limited vocation ☺. She ended up leaving the convent and launching her vocation in the wider world. Marilou had sales in her blood, the gift of gab in her genes, an inherent kindness and a wonderful sense of humor that made her a people magnet. Those qualities were constant in health and in sickness, in both prosperous and lean days. She was consistently loving, funny, unpredictable. There was never a dull moment in Marilou’s presence.

The Gatherings family was a huge part of Marilou’s life and legacy. That family isn’t just the dear folks like Mary Ann, Nancy and Chris who stand behind the counter, but includes the customers who come not so much to find a gift as to find a lift. Marilou would often say, “We just run a little gift shop, we don’t do brain surgery here,” but she was understating the importance of that shop in the life of this community. People turn up at 16 Broad Street to pour out their hearts, to multiply their joys, to divide their sorrows. It’s a hub of Frank Capra-like small-town America, and Jimmy Stewart had nothing on Marilou Finan. God placed her right where God wanted and needed her – as a minister of sorts to the church and unchurched alike.

The passage from the prophet Micah that Bernard read contains one of the most focused statements in Scripture about what a holy life should look like:

[A]nd what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?
Micah 6.8

Our sister Marilou did that really well. For sixty-five years she’s been leaven in the loaf of this world, the salt of the earth, a lamp set on a stand shedding light for all in the house. Her partnership with Danielle in these past eight years has intensified her joy, deepened her love of life, made her faith shine that much more brightly. Danielle’s love and care, both tender and tough, certainly extended Marilou’s life. Danielle never really converted Marilou to her own nutritional standards, never exorcised Marilou’s love of cheeseburgers, never convinced Marilou that any other beverage could truly compete with the taste of a cosmopolitan, but Danielle’s discipline at least gave Marilou something to think about!

Psalm 139 is about God’s loving eye and hand upon us, from the time God saw us being knit together in our mother’s womb until we are safe on the other side of death, where there is more and eternal life.

Where can I go... from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?

If I climb up to heaven, you are there;
 if I make the grave my bed,
 you are there also.

Psalm 139.6-7

Ovarian cancer was a scary diagnosis for Marilou, way back when. She fought the initial onset, and then recurrence after recurrence after recurrence. Again, in the words of Psalm 139:

If I say,
 “Surely the darkness will cover me,
 and the light around me
 turn to night,”
 darkness is not dark to you;
 the night is as bright as the day;
 darkness and light
 to you are both alike.

Psalm 139.10-11

Part of the legacy Marilou has left us is that of strong faith. When night fell and winds howled and waves rose in her life, like in the Gospel we heard today, she was afraid, as any of us would be. One of her favorite sayings was the Breton fisherman’s prayer: “Lord, Your sea is so vast, and my little boat so small. Amen” But time and again, in the midst of the storm, she would hear the Lord Jesus say to her,

“It is I; do not be afraid.”

“It is I; do not be afraid.”

John 6.20

In that Gospel story, Jesus walked on water, in the midst of the gale, to be with His friends, to comfort, en-courage, to save. Later, He walked on the Via Dolorosa, all the way to Calvary, to die for His friends. Some people have the crazy notion that faith should preclude suffering. We only need to read the Bible or look around us to discover that faith **doesn’t** prevent suffering. Instead, faith is trust that suffering has been radically contained and redeemed by the suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Marilou was the first to say she wasn’t a saint. We aren’t saints either. That’s why we need a Savior. Thank heaven we have one in our Lord Jesus Christ. There’s another Gospel

story about a woman who asked Jesus for “crumbs.” She sought healing for her daughter, but told Jesus He didn’t have to give her an entire loaf, just a few crumbs.... Marilou received the equivalent of a whole loaf from the Lord over her lifetime, and savored every crumb as it came. She taught us to love the little moments and to accept and use the tiniest opportunities for togetherness or kindness.

At this, Marilou’s funeral service, we’re invited to feast on a nibble and sip of glory, the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is like the hors d’oeuvres before the full banquet which we will enjoy in the kingdom of heaven. It is the mini-meal which is mighty in its power to bring forgiveness, comfort, strength, and joy. These crumbs of bread and drops of wine are more than enough to sustain us spiritually on our journey. We feast in hope, trusting that God will keep His baptismal promise to Marilou and to us: having shared in Christ’s death we will also share in His resurrection. Death is not our destiny. This life, beautiful as it is, is but the prelude to another and eternal life. God’s love in Jesus Christ is more powerful than any sin and any sickness. “Christ has triumphed! Alleluia!” Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham