

Jerrie Ann's Homily by Bishop Joseph Estabrook USN
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The readings selected for today's celebration are incredibly poignant. All three capture the life of this wonderful woman that God has graced us with and given to us as his gift, Jerrie Goewey. A better gospel couldn't have been chosen. John puts into the mouth of Thomas that perennial question all of us have asked at sometime: "Given all of this is true, that there is a heaven, a life after this how do you get there? How do we know what to believe? How do we know who to listen to and what to follow? Life is so complicated, so how do you know?" And Jesus answers Thomas so very clearly: "Thomas, I am the way, the truth and the Life, I am the door, I am the sheep gate, I am the light, and I am that way you are truly looking for".

The most burning desire of this God of ours is this: Not to be known as a God of power and magic like the god of our imaginings, or as the kind of God we might be in our little cartoon worlds, but rather he wanted to be known for who he is, A God of Love, Unconditional Love! "Who is God?" They ask Jesus, and in response he tells that beautiful story of the prodigal son, the son gone bad, who wastes all his father's gifts and drifts far away. But the Father's response is to wait, almost frantically, every day for his return. To wait and look and stand on watch every day until that one moment in time he just sees a glimmer of his son's return and he runs like a madman to put his arms around him. To the confusion and consternation of everyone, he not only forgives his son but restores him to his original dignity without even flinching "that's who your Father is" Jesus replies.

And then Jesus proceeds to paint this portrait of God of Love in the way he lives. He becomes him. He makes God our Father come alive and makes him believable and real. "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." And he asks us to go out and do likewise, paint the portrait of God as he is, for the people looking for him. Make him come alive for them. Make him accessible to them. Thomas, Jesus says, replying to his anxiety: "I am the way, the truth. I am life itself. Who ever sees me sees the Father. You already know what God looks like because you have known me."

If you've ever been in a conversation or discussion of any consequence or controversy with Jerrie Goewey, or one in which you were trying to get through the complications of life, then you can remember with me what that experience was like. Jerrie would listen to you, hang onto your every word with her ever present "uhuh, uhuh, uhuh, right" and then repeat back what you said to make sure she got it right but so too that you could hear it outside your own head. "So you think...." And then she'd say "uhuh" again, and quietly walks over to refill her cup of coffee. And then she would return, and there would be a pause as she continued to look deeply into your soul. And then came the crowning touch as she said, "But don't you think...." and she would lay it on you, hitting the nail on the head every time, what you needed to hear, what you needed to know, what Jesus himself would have said. When you walked away you had one of the deepest experiences of who Jesus was in this lifetime that you ever could have had. How do you get to heaven? Which way is right? How do I get there? Jerrie Ann would tell you in a way you could understand.

I remember sitting at the table with her once and feeling rather down, and telling her how exhausted I was and feeling worn out. And she looked at me and asked me: "When was the last time you really prayed Joe?" And I defensively asked her: "What do you mean asking a priest a question like that you silly girl!" And she smiled back, and got me another cup of coffee, sat down again, looked me in the eye and repeated the last part of the question, really prayed huh?" The woman never let up! And to this day when I feel discouraged or exhausted like I can't go on, I can see Jerrie Ann's face before me. Looking me in the eye repeating over and over "Really prayed Joe, huh". "Do not be troubled" Jesus said: "just believe". You have already seen the Father and felt his Love. Jerrie Ann says you have known me, haven't you? Then you know the Father. That first reading is so on target...

And the second reading today is so powerful that I would like to just underline what it says. Once more: God is light, in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have any kind of relationship with him and yet walk in the darkness, then we lie and we do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, then we have a oneness with him and with others that others are still yearning for. Living in his light we have complete access to all that is true and good and beautiful in Life. For the blood of Jesus his Son, purifies us from all the obstacles that keeps us from him.

Jerrie Ann lived in that light. There isn't one person here that wouldn't agree with that statement. When you were with Jerrie Ann the room was aglow. Everything was on fire with her energy. And it wasn't just her personality, it was her faith! Her faith made everything come alive and you came alive. There is probably no other word in Scripture that captures who Jerrie Ann was more than the word: "Light" She so lived in God's light that she herself became the light to so many of us here today. There isn't much about who Christ was and stood for in life that you couldn't find reflected in Jerrie Ann's. He was the source of her light. She lived life with such a commanding presence because she somehow was in touch with the one who is life itself. Even the few times when he seemed so far away, she still believed his light was there and helped you believe it as well.

When I was about 8 my dad, who was a civil engineer, worked in a cement plant outside of Saugerties. I remember it well through 8yr old eyes: it looked like the castle at Mordor in Lord of the Rings down in a dirt crater with big black smoke stacks. It looked huge and almost evil. But I was intrigued by it and really wanted to see it up close but company policy was that no children could be at the plant while it was in operation. So one night, dad took me there, and at night it looked really ominous, with the high dim lights casting dull yellow hue over the red dirt. It looked very scary. I can remember walking down with him, down into the crater, moving closer and closer to the huge door, holding his hand tightly and too afraid to say anything. And when we walked through the huge black door and darkness closed all around me, I was dumbstruck. It was so dark! I just held dad's hand tight as I could and he confidently walked into the darkness. "Hold on", he said, "I know the way and I'll get the light in a minute". It seemed forever before he finally flipped the big switch and then....BAM! The whole inside lit up like a flash. All I can remember saying was "Wow" and looking up at him as he smiled and said: "Not bad, huh?"

I don't care who you are. No matter how brave, no matter how spiritual there are some things in life that are just positively and absolutely frightening. And when it comes to death, staring it in the face, it can be overwhelming. It's as frightening as walking down into that dark space of the unknown, into the Castle at Mordor. Some go through it alone. Others, like us, like Jerrie Ann, go through it with something we call faith. It's like holding dad's hand. It's still ominous, it's still frightening, but faith is like holding dad's hand. There's a certainty there, a surety, a confidence, that everything, somehow will be all right. And as I say this I can almost see Jerrie head nodding in agreement because she took that journey.

She was one who always walked with us no matter where we were on the journey. Most especially, you could count her walking with you in the moments of darkness and fear. These past few months she walked the journey herself, down toward that Castle at Mordor, and in her long journey, she walked in faith. And God her Father, and Jesus, her brother, walked with her and held her hand and she never looked back and never looked for another way. There was only one way. He was that way. And the other day, April 4th Jerrie walked with the Lord through that big door. And BAM, the lights went on and Heaven was never as bright as when Jerrie Ann walked through that door.

Ken, no one here can ever know what feelings are inside of you at this moment. The two of you shared your lives together so completely that you struggled with what to call it. Marriage was not

enough. Soul mates was closer, but no words could ever capture what you were to each other. And now, no words could even begin to express what this moment must be for you. And as close as any of us have been to Jerrie Ann, as overpowering as her light was to us, how much more so for you in your own life with her. The words of the first reading of Proverbs must have been written with Jerrie Ann in mind:

"Who can find a wife of such noble character? Her husband has no choice but to have full confidence in her. He lacks nothing of value. Her children call her blessed. She has such wisdom that faithful instruction is always on her tongue, and armed with Faith. She can laugh at the days to come." Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all Jerrie Ann. "Charm is deceptive, beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is truly to be praised."

We can only say Ken that what we do know and what we share with you is that Jerrie has truly been God's gift to us in ways we can't describe either. She has shown us a side to God that no one else ever could. And we are eternally grateful to God that she was such a powerful part of our life. Eternally grateful. Thank you Jerrie Ann, We will never forget you.