

Funeral Homily
Margaret M. (Delaney) O'Connell
April 3, 2018
Bishop Mark O'Connell

Gospel Mark 12: 28-34: You shall love God with all of your Heart, Soul, Mind, Strength, Your neighbor as yourself

A few weeks ago my mother, my sister, and I met with the Head Nurse at Bethany, Barbara Galluzo. My mother's health had declined to the point where it was near her end but her mind was still completely clear and alert. Eventually in the meeting Barbara told her gently that if all this kept going my mother would die. My mother said, "Yes, and so will you!" She turned to my sister Margaret Mary and said, "and so will you," and to me and said, "and so will you." She was not afraid of death. In fact I cannot recall my mother ever being afraid of anything really. This is a woman who moved from Boston to Toronto with three children ages 1, 2 and 3, and after I was born, there steered four children under five. This is a woman who sacrificed so much for my father and her family, a woman that didn't drive for years and then took it up again at age 79 when my father had a stroke. She was not afraid in life and she was not afraid to die.

She was not afraid to die because she lived a scrupulously honest life where she indeed loved God with her whole heart and her whole soul and her whole mind and strength and her neighbor as herself.



My mother's heart was full of compassion. She was a tremendous listener but she would get stuck on things that were said that were not quite right. In her high school yearbook they described her among other nice things as the last one to get a joke. She loved to laugh and had a beautiful genuine laugh but she always looked with compassion first so sometimes I had to reassure her that something was indeed a joke. I think she had so many visitors at her room in Bethany because she gave each person who came in her full attention even when she was exhausted, and she would pray about all of it and give wise and beautiful feedback. All my life with both my mother and father I have had an audience like that. She was fiercely loyal and full of love.

The day before she died, my sister had her last visit with my mother. Both of them knew it could be the last time but there was a small hope that my mother would make her 92nd birthday which was 2 days after she died. My mother made my sister comfortable enough to leave and said she was tired and would sleep. My sister did not leave right away however and decided to instead just watch her sleep for a while. All of a sudden my mother reverently blessed herself. Even the night she died, my mother did not go to sleep until first saying her prayers. My mother grew up in a family where her brother, Fr. David Delaney was a priest and her sister, Sr. Jean Delaney is a religious Sister, and she was completely grounded in her faith. Her list of people she prayed for was legendary, and it included so many of you here today. When she would attend Church we often had to wait for my mother to finish her prayers. Even as kids we knew not to disturb her when she was praying. In her last days the sisters and staff at Bethany were a great focus of her prayers. Loving and trusting God with her whole soul she was an interceder on earth and will be an intercessor, I believe, in Heaven.

I am not placing her in Heaven, although I believe in Heaven with all my heart and soul mind and strength, as she would not want me to presume that. In fact, in my last conversation with her, she said firmly that she was ready to see my father and then her careful mind paused. "I want to see Dad" she said, and then after the pause she said, "well, maybe I will have to wait." I was afraid to ask if she thought her purgatory was going to be a long one or Dad's. That careful accurate mind was what made her a mathematician graduating from Emmanuel and working as a "computer" at MIT during World War II and later at Harvard University in the physics lab as a proud assistant to Professor Harry Mimno. The biggest blessing that Bethany Health Care Center gave her and us was that she was no longer too exhausted to read. From the moment she arrived she read ferociously. In the last two years of her life she read countless books, including everything Ann Tyler ever wrote and most of what David McCullough ever wrote, "Pride and Prejudice", "Anna Karenina", "The Help" and many more. She noticed that many of them cited "Don Quixote" so she read "Don Quixote" finishing it a couple of months before she died and then was disappointed when the next book she picked up did not refer to it. She also took up Mathematics again, carefully doing math sheets everyday beginning with grade 5 level and working her way through grade 10 level math until a few months before she died. She used her mind to its fullest, and therefore, she loved God through it.

What delayed her all those years was taking care of her family. First and foremost us, her children, but then my father faded away with Alzheimer's Disease and, despite her own weakness, she was his caregiver for years, feeding him, dressing him, and cleaning him, such that he lived with great dignity until it was impossible. She then spent every ounce of her energy on taking care of herself, even with our help, especially Margaret Mary's help; this took enormous strength. On June 25th, 2016 she fell and broke her hip and arm. I arrived at Bethany and lay on the floor beside her as she waited for the EMTs. Every fiber of her being was determined to make my ordination as bishop less than 2 months later. Later at the hospital, the emergency room doctor tried to tell us that she could likely die from this fall, and none of us believed it because of her fierce determination and enormous strength. Well she made it. She was there at the Ordination, and after that long day when she finally arrived back at Bethany, she watched the rebroadcast of it on Catholic TV.

Which leads me to how all of us should love our neighbors as ourselves. Which she did very beautifully throughout her life respecting the dignity of all people and helping as best as she could to bring peace to this world. I'll leave it to God to know how many acts of love she did so naturally.

I entrust her body and soul to God today. I ask all of you to do the same. Much more important for her - for me to express would be her enormous desire for all of you to be people of faith. Her belief in Jesus and the way she accepted and adored the Eucharist said everything. Her acceptance in the weakness of individual priests and bishops and religious without a single cell wavering from her belief in the Catholic Church. My mother had a wonderful smile always, but when it came to her faith (and dessert) her face radiated joy. That joy is available to all of us gathered here remembering her simple but beautiful life. That joy is complete only in Heaven and to get there we need to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbor as ourself.

Her life on earth has ended, may she live forever in Heaven, because she died a week ago, and so will you.