

Before I begin my formal remarks about Judy I feel there are two things about her funeral mass she would want me to point out. The first is that I am sure Judy would have appreciated the fact that the homily was delivered by an Irishman and the eulogy by an Italian as we all know how wonderful that combination was in Judy. Secondly, I don't know if you noticed the wreath of flowers in the vestibule of the church that was sent by the "DeacoNESS Class of Laredo." Judy had a wonderful sense of humor and I am sure she would have got a kick out of that...

### *Eulogy for Dr. Judy Ryan*

When we sent a card from the office of the School of Theology a month ago to Judy's home I signed it and said "To Judy, I knew you before I knew you." A word of explanation in regards to my somewhat cryptic note – when I was finishing my dissertation research sometime toward the end of 2006 I had set myself the task of reading anew every Roman Catholic commentary on the writings of St. Paul the Apostle known to man. This was done in the absolute vain hope that I might wrap up my dissertation without missing any pivotal insight that might have drifted by me in the previous years. During those months I encountered a book by a woman who, coincidentally enough, I would be working with once I finished my research. The book was the *Sacra Pagina Commentary* on Philippians and Philemon and the woman who I encountered in the pages of that wonderfully written volume was Judy. I indeed knew her before I knew her.

Many of you who are gathered here have had the honor, or maybe I should say that many of you have been subjected to, scholastic biblical writing. It tends to be overly critical, horrendously tedious and bereft of any of the Christian joy we are all called to exhibit, yes even us academic theologians. As I read through this commentary on Philemon by Judy, however, I found that I was in a theological world that I had only encountered once before in my studies and that was in the writings of Fr. Raymond Brown. I mention Fr. Brown and Judy together here because both of them simply exuded kindness and Christian joy in their writings – both of them clearly liked what they were doing and, here is the most important part, took extreme joy in the faith that they had the good fortune to be able to express both on the written page and in the classroom. I cannot underestimate or underemphasize how rare this sentiment is in not only writings on scripture but in the general theological dialogue that is so common today. Too often, the printed page is used not to enlighten but to combat; it is a means of argument – often vitriolic – and not one of Christian conversation. In the four years that I had the privilege of considering myself of colleague of Judy Ryan I can honestly say she never succumbed to these temptations of our more baser natures – when Judy talked about scripture, or God, or the Church, or doctrine she always spoke from the grounded center of one who cared, one who loved the persons she would be speaking to. She truly and deeply cared about everyone and always discussed theology from the *a priori* position of caring. Whether she was teaching Catholic Social Teaching, Mark and Method, Paul and His Letters or Homiletics, Judy cared and cared deeply.

But, there was indeed another side of Judy that I was surprised to encounter. I had been at the School of Theology for only a few months when I found myself in the middle of my first academic faculty meeting. Judy had occupied what I later found out was her normal place at the table – a distance at some remove from the chair, off to the side, a place where she could simply observe and enjoy her pizza and occasionally comment on an item of interest to her. At this

particular meeting, however, the Dean of the School of Theology, Dr. Sandy Magie, had given Judy the charge of reorganizing aspects of the biblical curriculum – I believe it had something to do with changing the order in which classes were offered. Now, any of you who have been engaged in a faculty meeting can attest, any change in curriculum is a stone cold guarantee of at least a half an hour's debate as to the relative pros and cons. Yet, as Judy unfolded the changes she did so in such a methodical and logical way that within a couple of minutes we all had absolutely no choice but to agree with all the changes that Judy had recommended - there was simply no good reason to disagree with her.

I mentioned earlier that the presence of Christian joy was evident in Judy's writings but I must also mention that it was equally evident in Judy's daily life. She took joy in her family, in her mom and sister Barbara especially. She also took tremendous joy in her students and without exception – and this is particularly amazing to me the OTHER scripture professor – she universally liked her students. I can't tell you how many times over the past few years Judy, Sandy and I would be in Sandy's office discussing the student du jour and Judy would invariably interject all of a student's strengths even in the face of my interjections of a particular student's foibles. Suffice it to say I cannot remember ever having swayed Judy to my opinion and more often than not found myself regretfully agreeing with her and giving a somewhat problematic student another chance in a particular class. She indeed cared deeply.

I will end my eulogy with my last memory of Judy. Sandy and I had gone to visit her at the hospital after her final treatment. As always, Judy was smiling and optimistic in the face of a particularly painful diagnosis. We sat and chatted for a while and it eventually became evident that it was time to go. Sandy and I said our goodbyes and started to make our way out of the hospital room but before we could cross the threshold Judy interjected, "I love you guys." Not good bye or I will talk to you soon or any of the other trivialities we have grown accustomed to in such situations but the far simpler and powerful, "I love you guys." We love you too, Judy. All of us.