



Society of the Sacred Heart
United States – Canada

Homily for Judy Cagney's Funeral **Given by Rosemary Bearss, RSCJ**

You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and with your soul and with your mind—and a second thing is: that we do the same thing for other people—on these two commandments hang all the laws and the Prophets. These are the words that come to mind when I think about the life of Judy Cagney.

Those words of Matthew's Gospel about loving God with our mind as well as with our heart and soul come first to my mind when I think of Judy. God gave Judy a magnificent mind. One that could sort through the complexity of a situation and clarify the reality of what transpired and what should be done. She did this with alacrity and precision that was truly amazing.

Last month, when she began to realize that she had a health problem, she connected with her family and friends to outline for us this new reality in her life. Her descriptions were clear, to the point, and with the promise of follow-up. I was on the list with about 19 other friends, and we were given the facts. And then she said: "I am not afraid". The second email came a few days later with her thoughts. She said "Clearly, I don't want to die, but I can't live with the pain I have had for the last few weeks." When I read that I knew that her fabulous mind had done its work in her; she had sifted through her reality, her journey was clear, and she began taking the steps of clarifying all the details of the journey that God was calling her to complete.

Judy was thinking through a process, much like I had seen her do so many times in the years that I knew her. I have known her for almost 50 years. Both of us were members of the Chicago Province. We were often involved together on committees of the Province, and as we came to know one another well, she asked me to direct a number of her retreats. We both worked at Barat College for a time, and we also worked together on the Chicago end of the process of merging our five Provinces into one United States Province—this was a work that took about ten years to complete.

Nance O'Neil was named the first Provincial of this new Province, and Judy, Barbara Dawson and I, as well as a number of others, were all working with Nance, to make this new Province really work. Then, six years later I was named Provincial, and I asked Judy to be on my team.

I tell you all this because that same beautiful mind and heart that determined her final journey with such clarity and simplicity, was the same process that she brought to every issue in which she was involved. Those of us who knew and loved her recognized the steps that she took to become clear, and thorough, and at peace with her conclusion.

But it wasn't just a process; it was a life that she lived with integrity and love that was strong, carefully thought through, and was backed up with the proper evidence for the situation at hand. Judy loved deeply. She loved God and she loved each person differently, in the way that was appropriate for that very person. It was the kind of love that was described in that Corinthian passage that Heather just read to us. It states: love is patient, kind, is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. But this next line is the one we often laughed about. Paul states that love does not insist on its own way! Now, those of us who knew Judy well know that she liked to be right! But the fact is she most often was right! Not only right, but most often brilliant!

Now, let us go back to the passage from Matthew about the two commandments. It was not easy for the people of Jesus time to see what was most important in their religion. The simple people felt lost. The scribes talked about 613 commandments in the law. How could people find their way in such a complex web of precepts and prohibitions? At some point Jesus was asked: What is the most important part? Which is the principal commandment, the one that gives meaning to the others?

Jesus did not have to think twice. He answered the words that Jewish men repeated at the beginning and the end of every day: "Hear O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." Jesus had recited those words that very morning.

Then he added something that no one had asked him: "A second commandment is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is nothing more important than these two commandments." For Jesus, they cannot be separated. One cannot love God and then turn away from one's neighbor.

In my experience of knowing Judy Cagney I saw her living out these two commandments. Similar to the way Jesus responded to the lawyers who questioned him, Judy had the ability to take on a complex problem, and break it down to its essential elements, and then offer a way of proceeding based on concrete evidence.

So in conclusion I simply want to say: Judith Anne Cagney was God's gift to us all.