

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

November 4, 2006  
Fr. Bill McGinty

**Ruth Renn Conroy**

On behalf of Debra and her family allow me to welcome you to this memorial service for Ruth Conroy. No matter how old we become nothing prepares us for the loss of a parent. We are always all destined to become orphans. Perhaps, that is why we gather on occasions like these. There is comfort in numbers but also there is a shared experience of loss.

When we were contemplating the readings for today's service it seemed natural to go to the Book of Ruth and see what we would find there.

The story of Ruth is the story of a great relationship between Ruth and her mother in law, Naomi. They are more like mother and daughter who love each other dearly in good times and bad they are therefore each other.

When that same relationship happens to us with our parent we think of it as a blessing; it is something extra as if duty and motherhood are not enough, we have friendship thrown in too.

Ruth is a gift in Old Testament Israel because she wasn't Jewish and she didn't need to be there. Ruth Renn Conroy was also a gift 67 years ago. She saw four major wars and 12 presidencies; all from her tiny state of New Jersey.

For all of us who did not know her, we can only look at the apple that fell from the tree. We don't even call her Debra Conroy. We call her just "Our Debbie"

If Ruth had some remote camera so that she could have seen on a daily basis what her daughter has been up to these last few years, she would have been justly proud, Social worker, pastoral counselor, prison ministry, feminist, civil rights activist, partner and a grade college student. Mom would be proud, and she was proud of her daughter and her son and her five grandchildren. As the Psalm today says:

"Sing to the Lord all the earth,  
Worship the Lord with joy  
Come before him with happy songs."

The 2<sup>nd</sup> reading we chose speaks of Resurrection. It is a Resurrection that Ruth is already experiencing, a Resurrection free of illness, hospitals, pain and suffering. Today she experiences what Christ promised for all who believe in his name.

Christ conquered death that all men might one day live forever.

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Yet, tempted as we are to say that, Ruth's work is done. We all know that her life's work goes on through her children and grandchildren.

"I am the vine you are the branches" says Jesus in today's Gospel.

Ruth was that vine now today you are the branches. Perhaps in your lives you will achieve much more than she was able to in hers. But no matter how far you go in life, this is the vine from which you come. She nourished and comforted you and there is a sense in which she is now a part of you.

Jesus said I have but one commandment for you; that you love one another. Just as I love you. The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them.

That is what mothers do. As today you bid farewell to Ruth, try to remember the vibrant person you once knew. The person who had dreams, hopes, ambitions. The person who graduated high school in 1957 singing to Elvis and Buddy Holy. She saw some amazing things in her life. Jets, television, a man on the moon, computers, the end of Communism and much, much more. Yet, if any one of us had asked her in the last three years what was the most amazing thing she ever saw, she would have said: my children. My grandchildren. You were her miracle, and you are her achievement. You are her Hollywood star. You are her Mona Lisa, you are the symphony of her life.

I wonder what she would want of you today if she could say. Surely it would be: Be happy. Don't settle. Follow your dreams. Make someone happy. Don't forget me.

This Christmas we will burn a candle on this Sanctuary on Christmas night and as we sing our Silent Nigh, Holy Night let us remember her. Home at last. Where there is no pain. Home for the holiday, forever with her Lord and Family.

May she rest in the reward of God's peace and in the words of her Old Testament name sake let us hear her say:

"Don't ask me to leave you. Let me go with you. Wherever you go, I will go.  
Wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God  
will be my God.

Whenever you die, I will die and that is where I will be buried for even death will not separate us.

May she rest in peace.

Amen+

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