

A True Story and Some Thoughts for 2009

Eleanor was 89 years old when she met Molly, an attorney and a Minister of Care who brought the Holy Eucharist to her and her 86 year old sister, Margaret. Eleanor and Margaret had never married and had lived together all their lives. Margaret was not totally capable of caring for herself, and Eleanor had always taken care of her. Now, they were both frail (each about 4'8" tall and 95 pounds) and hardly ever left their apartment. Eleanor had been a legal secretary in a Chicago law firm for 25 years. They lived frugally but fully. Eleanor invested whatever they did not need for daily expenses in small Certificates of Deposit and some stocks. She had come from a very poor family and knew the value of a dime.

The two sisters were fervent Catholics. Margaret used to spend hours in church every week - at daily mass, regular confession, rosary, adoration, etc. Over the years, Eleanor had studied her Catholic faith with great resolve - reading the Bible, watching EWTN, reading Catholic newspapers and other books, and attending various faith programs. She had a deep and loving relationship with Jesus- her constant companion.

Molly became friends with the two sisters. She noticed, however, that when she hugged them, they both stood with their arms hanging lifelessly at their sides-- as if not quite sure what to do. Over the next six years, their relationship deepened. One night, Eleanor confessed to Molly that in her entire life she had never flung her arms around anyone's neck. She came from a family that did not openly express love. She did not remember being hugged or kissed. Her father was older and her mother, a wonderful woman, was very quiet and reserved. Eleanor didn't understand human affection- she was not into any of that "mushy stuff," as she called it. By then, Molly was helping the two women do things that they could not do for themselves. If not for Molly's help, a nursing home would have been the only option. They had no other immediate family and had outlived their friends. Eleanor would look at Molly, shake her head and say she didn't understand why Molly helped them - two complete strangers. She just couldn't understand it.

Molly, on the other hand, had been blessed from birth and surrounded with people who loved her openly and tenderly - great grandparents, grandparents, and her mother and father. She understood human affection and it came naturally for her. God's commandment to love thy neighbor was easy for Molly; she enjoyed helping others. Her life experiences had taught her how to love others, and she loved Eleanor and Margaret.

While Eleanor may have had trouble with the demonstrative side of loving thy neighbor, she had no problem with the first part of that command: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Matthew 22:37. One day, out of the blue, Eleanor told Molly that one time she had sent the Pope a check for \$20,000. A former secretary, who took care of her sister on her meager wage, made all of their own clothes, cut coupons and wouldn't order more than \$50 worth of groceries a week because the delivery charge would go up a few dollars, had sent a check for \$20,000 to the Pope??? That was more than she now received yearly in social security. "Yeah, right," Molly thought, but it was true. Molly asked her why she did that. Eleanor simply said with a shrug, "I didn't need it, and I thought someone else could use it."

Margaret passed away in December 2006. Molly moved Eleanor to her own condo building so she could better care for her. Eleanor had a stroke in May 2007. Molly then arranged 24 hour live-in care for Eleanor so she could continue to keep her close and watch over her while maintaining her

job as an attorney, taking care of her own family and being involved in many other activities. Molly and Eleanor became best friends despite their 40-year age difference. They shared their faith. They shared their love. When Eleanor passed away in February 2008, she was a very good hugger and now at ease with all that “mushy stuff”!

It wasn't until after Eleanor died that Molly understood how Eleanor's deep love for God had led her to love her neighbor and the extent of that love. Molly learned that from 1986-2000, this extraordinary former secretary had sent \$150,000 directly to the Pope, in addition to her regular parish contributions and other donations. After 2000, she continued to send checks in similar amounts to her favorite organizations- the Poor Clares, EWTN, or various religious orders or Catholic organizations. She was so awesome. She didn't need it, and thought someone else could use it. It was that simple. How many people think that way? She helped many with her generosity- quietly, without fanfare.

It has been 10 months since Eleanor died, and Molly misses her very much. When she reflects on her experience with Eleanor, she always thinks of her favorite Bible passage from which she has drawn strength many times:

Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns,
yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Are not you more important than they?

Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span?

Why are you anxious about clothes?

Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin.

But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them.

If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow,
will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith?

So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?'

All these things the pagans seek.

Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

But seek first the kingdom (of God) and his righteousness,
and all these things will be given you besides.

Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself.

[Mat 6:26-34]

Eleanor sought the kingdom of God first. Her love of Jesus led her to help others. She helped others, trusting that God knew her needs and would care for her. She and Margaret were good and faithful servants. When their hour of need arrived, true to His promise, Molly appeared at their door and loved them both- unconditionally. They, in turn, taught her about her Catholic faith and helped her deepen her relationship with God. God also knew what Molly needed. In the end, Eleanor and Molly both better understood how to love God and neighbor because of each other.

On Christmas Eve 2008, Molly and her family drove to their farm in Indiana for Christmas. After late mass, she and her daughter were up wrapping presents until 3:00 am. About 2:00 am they ran out of name tags. Molly's daughter decided to look in the basement of the farmhouse for some old tags, but she was afraid to go by herself, so Molly went with her. They looked all over, but didn't see any. They were about to give up when they spotted a bag hanging from a hook in the ceiling of the back room that seemed to have some Christmas items in it. They took it down and removed some gift bags. Molly was about to hang it back up, when her daughter said, “Wait! There's an envelope with your name on it!” Sure enough. In the bottom of the bag was an envelope addressed

to Molly. She took it out and opened it. It was a Christmas card. Inside, it was signed, “Love, Eleanor and Margaret.”

Neither Eleanor nor Margaret had ever been to the farm. There is no reason a card from them would be there. Moreover, the card would have had to have been there since at least 2005, before Margaret died. What were the chances that at 2:00 am Christmas morning Molly would be led to a lonely corner of a basement 200 miles from home to find a card from her beloved friends? Molly cried. A Christmas card from Eleanor and Margaret! It was the perfect gift. She looked up and smiled through the tears.

It is easy for some people to love their neighbors. It is not as easy for others--for many reasons. If it is not easy for you, don't feel bad. We are all different. If you are having trouble with love, try working on your relationship with God in 2009. Work on loving God with all your heart, mind and soul. If you are successful, it should lead you to love others and help you love even in an unloving world. (Mushiness is optional!)

We humans have whole professions that help us deal with our relationships with each other. Yet, we can tell each other what we like and don't like. We can see the expressions on each others' faces. Human relationships are not easy! They take work. If we are to have a meaningful relationship with God, we must work at it too. Like Eleanor, read the Bible and study your Catholic faith. If you are strong in your faith, freely share it as she did with Molly. AND--- If you need some real life experience with love first-hand, please visit us at the Mission of Our Lady of the Angels. We would LOVE to see you soon, and remember --- to those we serve at the Mission, YOU may be the face of Christ's Love in 2009. Let yourself be embraced by faith in this new year.

Come join us.

Merry Christmas from Eleanor-
A little woman who thought big!



A New Year's Reflection

Reflect on this passage from 1 Corinthians:

Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts.
But I shall show you a still more excellent way.
If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love,
I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal.

And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge;
if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love,
I am nothing.
If I give away everything I own,
and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love,
I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind.
It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated,
it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests,
it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury,
it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.

It bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never fails.
If there are prophecies,
they will be brought to nothing;
if tongues, they will cease;
if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing.

For we know partially and we prophesy partially,
but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.
When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child;
when I became a man, I put aside childish things.
At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face.
At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known.

So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.
[1 Cor 12:31-13:12]

1. As you sit here now, on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest, how would you rate your relationship with God, the Father? With Jesus, his son? With the Holy Spirit?
2. Was your relationship with each stronger this Christmas than it was a year ago?
3. Reflecting on the description above of what love is and is not, in 2008, do you think you were the face of Christ's love to your family? Your co-workers? To strangers? Would each of these groups agree with your perception of yourself? If not, why not?
4. Think of two things you could do in 2009 to improve your relationship with God and commit to doing that.
5. Think of two ways, no matter how small, that you could love others better in 2009 and commit to doing that.

In 2009 work for the kind of faith that allows you to trust God with all aspects of your life -
in good times and in bad.

God bless you and thank you for all you do for those served by the Mission.