

For Marie Therese Giordani
May 5, 1934 to June 6, 2008
Christ Episcopal Church
Rockville, MD

June 23, 2008

What is a friend? Agape and Phila



Marie Therese Giordani. One of God's precious souls, one of our good friends, part of our family. Many people claim this honor because so many fell in love with this incredible person. Some say it was the twinkle in her eye. That crooked smile. The ever expressive eyebrows. Her small but mighty stature. The total giving of herself to God and to God's work. She was a woman you could trust with your secrets – something Deborah Tanner says, in her studies of the differences between how men and women communicate, and I believe it is true, is the mark of true friendship among women. She was someone you could always trust, someone you could always depend on. Your friend, your confidant, and as I like to call her my Professor of Life. Her intellect was deep, she was well read, but she did not always share this. In our friendship she told me very little about her childhood in Corsica but I will share some of the happy and some of the not so happy stories with you today. Her family were friends of a young doctor in town – she was fascinated with medicine and science and all the things this young man had studied. She told me how he would explain things to her, about medicine and about science. One of her secret desires was the love of medicine and science and her wishes to have studied this in school – and this was one of the many basis of our friendship. When I traveled Marie Therese stayed at my house to 'cat-sit' – I discovered that she loved to read my medical books while I was away and so I would leave some that I thought she would appreciate most in strategic places for her to find. When I returned we had many interesting conversations about physiology, immunology, and even cosmology – the study of the how the universe is made, one of my own personal favorite topics. We both agreed that God indeed made a wonderful universe with so many things to

discover and explore. I am so happy I could share this with a good friend and to help her fulfill at least a little of her childhood dreams.

Many of the sad things about her childhood stemmed from the fact that she lived in Europe during WWII. Deprivation, starvation, and the destruction of her family. I do not know all the details; she did not want to share so many sad things with me. But I do know that Europe during this war, was not a good place to be and especially not for a young and vulnerable child. She did seem to enjoy my reminiscences of my happy childhood. The relationships I had with my parents, my brothers, growing up in the suburbs of Detroit during the baby-boom years with so many friends and a thriving automobile industry. It was her nature to downplay the sad things and rejoice in happiness.

Agape and Phila.

These two Greek words describe, in part, types of human relationships. Relationships with each other and relationships with the divine. Wikipedia... Phila: "Friendships of the good are ones where both friends enjoy each other's characters... This is the highest level of philia, and in modern English might be called true friendship." And we all know what a character Marie Therese was.

And now, Agape... from Wikipedia. "...one of several Greek words translated into English as 'love'. Many have thought that this word represents divine, unconditional, self-sacrificing, active, volitional, and thoughtful love." "...was used by the early Christians to refer to the self-sacrificing love of God for humanity, which they were committed to reciprocating and practicing towards God and among one another."

Marie Therese embodied these two forms of human relationships totally. That is why there are so many people here today. We all felt and experienced her philia and we know that she loved with Agape. Jesus' reply to the question "What is the greatest commandment?" "Love (agapao) the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 'This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it. "Love (agapao) your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Matt 22:37-41. This is what she did and what she brought out of other people... this was her evangelism. This quiet, shy, and beautiful person. Even when she was so sick and dying in the hospital. She brought this sense of Godliness and love out of people. This tiny little woman, with a beautiful French accent, so sincere in her love of God and her love of others. So many people visited her, so many people sent cards, so many people called, so many were kept up with news of Marie Therese by the internet. She smiled her beautiful, surprised, and bashful smile when I told her about this... She made me so proud to be a member of Christ Church Rockville. It brought many people together, deepened the love and friendships we have with each other, and opened us to so many others... her friends in Arizona, New York, Paris, Montreal... and even new friends to our community such as Dr. Dale Lawrence and his wife Trude – my friends and colleague from the NIH, members of the Hunger Fund in our Diocese of Washington, and so many of the staff at Holy Cross Hospital. Prayers were pouring in from everywhere. And the prayers were answered – not necessarily what we wanted to hear but what God knew was best... As we just heard, Jesus said: “very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.” It was time for Marie Therese to be in a closer relationship with Him. The prayer that was answered was that this truly remarkable person with an incredibly deep faith would have that faith deepen ever more. I was the one who told her she had ovarian cancer and that it was ‘stage IV’ – the worse that it could be and that there was very little hope for a cure or even very much time left in her life. She shrugged her shoulders and said: “One day at a time.” I reviewed what she wanted in her medical care, asked her how far she wanted to go, and promised her I would protect her... I would not let anyone hurt her... and that I would be with her and not let her be alone. But... she shrugged her shoulders, smiled and sighed and said again: “one day at a time”... she is the bravest person I have ever known. From Lamentations: “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.” The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is

good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.” And that is exactly what she did.

And now, it is time for our little friend to be with God – to learn all the wonders of the universe from the creator, to learn Agape, sacrificial love, from Jesus, God who became man to show us what we are capable of, and to be with the Holy Spirit to learn what it means to be with everyone all the time and to sustain us with God’s love.

For my friend, Marie Therese Giordani. May she rest in eternal peace.

Karen Near