

# Marguerite Rutan, Daughter of Charity: An Ordinary Saint

Mass of Thanksgiving, Beatification,  
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Homily of

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at the Mass of Thanksgiving for the Beatification  
of Marguerite Rutan

Last month, much of the world – Catholic and otherwise – had its attention focused on Rome and the event taking place in St. Peter's Square. It was the beatification of Pope – now Blessed – John Paul II. This good man had captured the imagination of many people during his long pontificate, and now he offered the world one more lesson around the Catholic practice of honoring our saints. Perhaps, Pope Benedict had this beatification in mind when (around the same time) he ended his two year catechesis on the saints and martyrs of the Church. His last talk was on what is most essential for sanctity, and he pointed to three elements: Sunday Eucharist, daily prayer, and observance of the commandments. Pope Benedict's repeated emphasis was that sanctity should be ordinary – something available to everyone. Towards the end of his presentation he offers this encouragement to all of us:

"I would like to invite you to open yourselves to the action of the Holy Spirit, who transforms our life, to be, we also, pieces of the great mosaic of holiness that God is creating in history."

Today, once again, our Church calls us together in celebration for one of our number who lived a life of faithful service and has, as Pope Benedict describes, become "a piece of the great mosaic of holiness that God is creating in history." As we all know, Sr. Marguerite Rutan, a Daughter of Charity, was martyred during the Revolution. Yesterday, we declared her "Blessed" which is our technical way of recognizing what she was and is. And, I would like to suggest that her holiness was

“ordinary.” No, not ordinary in the sense that it was unimportant or colorless, but ordinary in the sense that she accepted martyrdom for carrying out her daily role as a Daughter of Charity to the end of her life. It was ordinary in the sense that any Daughter of Charity could be expected to act in the same way for the sake of her fidelity to her charism and her poor. It was ordinary in the sense that any of us could aspire to live out our particular ministry and our unique vocation faithfully, and come to a similar sanctity. Marguerite offers us a model for our own lives.

The biblical readings which the Church offers for our consideration today point to an ordinary path of holiness. Each offers a different perspective, but all point to that same goal.

The first reading is taken from the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. It is presented to us as the instruction of a father to his son on how to live a good life. At the heart of biblical Wisdom literature is the realization that God has ordered this world for the good, and people should seek to live according to this order. One should live one's life well. The instruction is always practical, always doable, and always specific. One could easily say “ordinary.” This is how a normal person should live in order to please God and keep the commandments.

Just listen again to the guidance which is offered:

*A hungry man grieve not....  
Delay not to give to the needy.  
A beggar in distress do not reject;  
Avert not your face from the poor.  
From the needy turn not your eyes....  
Give a hearing to the poor man,  
and return his greeting with courtesy....*

One can hear in these directives the ways of a Daughter of Charity and the character of Marguerite Rutan as she ministered to her sick. One can also hear the kind of summons to which each of us is invited to be faithful: a call to holiness by being wise in a most ordinary way.

The second reading offers us Paul's famous reflection on Christian love in First Corinthians, chapter thirteen. It draws our attention away from what we do, and puts the emphasis on how we do it. Paul reminds us that everything must be done with love. Actions which seem to be marvelous, but which are not motivated by love are useless. When we stop and think, that is an extraordinary statement. The end, the goal, is not what is most important, but how one gets there. All one's efforts need to be driven by the desire to serve the other in love. Love is patient and kind and rejoices in the truth. Even the surrender of one's life

– “handing my body over” in Paul’s graphic text which echoes Marguerite’s surrender – is pointless unless it is done in love. The motto of the Daughters of Charity insists that it is not pride or stubbornness which motivates their actions, but that the “charity/love of Christ urges” them. This was Marguerite’s motivation for her resolute decision. The love of those whom she served in the hospital and elsewhere kept her faithful to her responsibilities and from that fidelity arose her condemnation. She was motivated daily by love and she offers us a model in that same regard as we carry out our call to sanctity.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus teaches the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. These commandments of the New Covenant confront us once again with the means for leading a holy, a “blessed” life; the call is not intended to be extraordinary. The meek, the just, the merciful are called “holy”; this way of living is within the possibilities of any of us. Among the beatitudes, we can recognize a particular way in which Marguerite expresses her sanctity; Jesus proclaims:

“Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.”

Her willingness to submit to the persecution in her day for the sake of her following of Christ is a clear fulfillment of this Gospel directive. It is no wonder that we call her “blessed.” She has tread the path before us, and shown the way with clarity and courage.

The celebration of Marguerite offers us a wonderful opportunity to reflect upon a life well-lived and the path to holiness. Pope Benedict’s description of the path to sanctity leading from the Eucharist, through prayer, and into Gospel living describes her well. All three of the Scripture readings can be held out as an answer to the question “How do I become a saint?” All three can be used to describe the life of Marguerite Rutan. She gives flesh and blood to the biblical images in her ordinary and faithful living as a Daughter of Charity. We thank God today for her example and we ask the Lord for the grace to respond well to the call for holiness so that we too can be counted among the “blessed.”