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THE HOLY CROSS VERSION OF ST. PAUL

Sister Judy Gomila, MSC

Presented by

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A HOLY CROSS VERSION OF ST. PAUL

JUDY GOMILA, MSC

Judith Ann Gomila's friends from elementary school remember her as a standout cheerleader. She had a magical way of peppering up a crowd at a basketball game. Though St. Mary of the Angels School was located downtown in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans, it would have been no surprise if it were reported that "Rah, Rah for SMA" was heard miles away on the more sedate streets of Uptown New Orleans.

There was and still is nothing sedate about the Ninth Ward where Judy was born, attended elementary and high school, and entered the Marianites. Raised in a single-parent household along with her brother, Lynn, Judy's creativity and exuberance made her a favorite among teachers and students at St. Mary of the Angels, a Marianite school. In fact, it was a Marianite who suggested that she try out for the cheerleading team when her basketball skills proved to be anything but impressive. She was chosen president of the Vocation Club and took part in many Carnival Balls at the school. (The balls were a chief means of raising money for the financially-strapped school.) When the Archdiocese of New Orleans mandated that Catholic schools could no longer sponsor these balls, the principal, Sr. Madeleine Sophie Hebert, undaunted, began to sponsor "pageants". Judy had a brush with royalty when she reigned as Queen Blanche of Castile (described as a pious and holy woman).

Her high school days were spent, not far away, at Academy of Holy Angels, another Marianite institution. Her time at AHA was almost a replica of her earlier years – she was a cheerleader, president of the Catholic Schools Mission Club (CSMC) and Layout Editor of the school newspaper.

She entered the Marianites in 1958, shortly after celebrating her 18th birthday. She "attacked" the novitiate with the same fervor and goodwill she'd exhibited in her school years. One of her novitiate companions says that Judy showed leadership qualities even then. She remembers one occasion when an instructor in one of their classes stated that if a teacher didn't come home exhausted every day, there was something wrong! One of the novices remarked that she didn't like that idea very much. Judy said she intended to give it everything she had! She's held true to that promise in everything she's done.

She taught elementary school for a few years after her novitiate days were completed. Then, it was off to Canada where she studied at Divine Word International Center of Religious Education in London, Ontario. (One of her classmates was Sr. Helen Prejean, C.S.J., of *Dead Man Walking* Fame.) When she returned home, armed with a certificate in Religious Education, Judy was missioned at St. Francis deSales Parish in Houma, Louisiana. (Thus began her career in religious education.) In 1970, she returned to New Orleans to serve as Vocation Director and Director of Formation Personnel.

For the next six years she would live and minister in the Desire area of New Orleans – a section of the Crescent City which made the St. Mary of the Angels area seem like the silk-stockings district! The area contained 20,000 people crowded into one square mile; living in run-down public housing projects and other sub-standard housing, with high unemployment rates and with their children attending below-average schools, the residents of the area had little hope of ever improving their lot. Many parents passed on this pessimistic attitude to their children. Separated from the rest of the city by a canal, accessible by one bridge, the area peopled by African-Americans was so isolated that many of the residents had never spoken to a white person!

Here comes the cheerleader! As Parish and Religion Education Coordinator at St. Philip the Apostle Parish, she worked tirelessly with the youth. She not only taught them the elements of their faith, she made them believe in themselves and their potential. That positive attitude paid off. Racial barriers were broken down; bright futures were visualized; self-respect was heightened; lives were transformed and saved. (How many, we'll never know!) Many of the youth to whom she ministered still keep in touch with her today. During these years, Judy would also serve on the Administration Teams of Sisters Mary Charles Clement and Vivian Coulon. In 1975 she returned to Canada to obtain a Masters Degree in Religious Education and Theology from St. Paul's University in Ottawa.

In 1977 Judy was once again elected to the Provincial Team of the Marianites. She would serve as Provincial Vice-President and then as Provincial of the Louisiana Province. The sisters loved her openness, her honesty, her great sense of humor and her common sense approach to everything. It was also at this time that Judy took up "clowning" as a way to preach God's love and mercy. The wig, the clothing, the grease paint – it all blended together to enhance the message as delivered by this free spirit. Sometimes, however, it created laughable moments. When the Leadership Conference of Women Religious held their annual meeting in New Orleans during the '80's, the planning committee wanted to give delegates a taste of real New Orleans culture so they put on a second line. For the uninitiated, that consists of people dancing with handkerchiefs and umbrellas behind a jazz band. Because I have two left feet, I was standing on the sidelines encouraging the revelers. I had been in conversation with a sister of another community. I was telling her a little of the history of the Marianites when she asked me, "Is your Provincial here this evening?" "O yes," I said, "she's that clown leading the second line." She gave me a very strange look and then quickly disappeared into the crowd.

Her sisters hated to see her go! But, off she went, in 1986, to Alaska, of all places! When Judy announced she was accepting a position as Director of Religious Education for the Diocese of Juneau, many a Marianite cried, "I'll go with you. I'm sure you can use some help!" Judy told a close friend, "Don't they know I'm trying to get away from 'em!" (Those who have felt the burdens associated with congregational administration will understand that response! We all need a little "breathing room" sometimes, even from those we love.) Although she lived in Juneau, the capital city which resembles a frontier town of the Old West, she traveled untold miles in her ministry as Director of Religious Education and Field Missionary for the Diocese of Juneau. She spent much of her time traveling to various outposts of the diocese to bring the message of Christ and the Church to native peoples and transplanted residents of the continental United States. Judy was not only bringing the word of God to the residents of these towns and villages, she was also bringing groceries, and various other commodities. Before she embarked by plane or ferry, she was careful to listen to the local National Public Radio affiliate. An announcement would be made: "Sr. Judy, when you come to Yakatak this weekend, please bring some diapers and batteries." She'd arrive on a Friday or Saturday, loaded down with the requested items, hold religion classes for the kids, and lead the Eucharistic Celebration on Sunday. On Monday, she'd return to Juneau to wear her other hat as Director of Religious Education for the Diocese. Quite a few Marianites enjoyed an "Alaskan experience" as Judy was very good at obtaining grants to bring them to Alaska to conduct workshops and seminars.

Our missionary returned to New Orleans in 1999. With the new millennium came a new ministry: Associate Director of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith and the Holy Childhood Association and Mission Educator for the Archdiocese of New Orleans. We failed to mention that previous to her time in Alaska, Judy mentored seminarians in parish work and taught a class in Catechesis at the major seminary in New Orleans.

That work, along with various speaking engagements, her ministry in the Desire Housing Project, and her positions in Congregational Administration, had made her well known as a "go-to" person, one who got things done. Thus, she received more than one job offer upon her return to New Orleans.

Why did she accept the Archdiocesan position? Bernard Haring answered that question in his work, *Prayer: the Integration of Faith and Life*, when he wrote,

"Faith is a joyous and grateful acceptance of Christ's coming, of his gracious presence, and therefore of the mission of bringing the good news to others by word and life. This is, and will always be, the very heart of evangelization."

It was "full steam ahead" for our home missionary. As with every other endeavor in her life, she plunged into this new ministry with everything she had. She met with educators, with elementary and high school classes, with adult groups. She even served as a Consultant for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops! In case we hadn't noticed, we soon realized what an uncanny knack she has to relate to all people: the very young, the very old and everyone in between; people at all economic levels, all educational and religious backgrounds, all ethnic groups. She brought to all an awareness of their sisters and brothers who lived at home and in foreign lands; of their rich cultures, of their sufferings caused by poverty, disease, religious and ethnic intolerance. "We are all one people" they came to realize. "We need not stand idly by. Through missionaries laboring throughout the world, we can help them both materially and spiritually." The St. Mary of the Angels cheerleader hadn't lost her touch!

During the seven years she labored for the Propagation of the Faith and the Holy Childhood Association, Judy did a few other things! She took on the responsibility of serving as Coordinator of the Marianite Associate Program. She was very active in

national groups such as the Office of Pontifical Mission Society; the Black and Indian Missions and the U.S. Catholic Mission Association. She traveled to many towns and cities across the country speaking and inspiring groups of every persuasion. Of course, she continued her involvement with many Marianite committees.

In 2009 the Provincial Team of the Marianites asked Sr. Judy to serve as Director of Public Relations for the Congregation. As usual, she said yes. She dove into her newest ministry. She set out immediately to revamp the Marianite web site. "Everybody seems to be eating in all the photos we have of our sisters" was her observation. (New Orleans people do live to eat while the rest of the country eats to live, its true, but she didn't want people to think that was all we did.) She upgraded the web page with photos of Marianites doing just about everything. All her hard work has paid off, last month alone the web page had 35,000 hits.

She continued producing "On the Grow", a periodic publication for the Associates who now number 350. She plans workshops and daylong retreats, meetings with the sisters, and trips to places of interest for them. In the fall of 2009, she and I edited the first issue of *The Marianite*, a quarterly magazine which has a circulation of 8,000. She also produces two electronic newsletters, Nia and Dream Catcher, for those engaged in ministry within the Black and Indian missions. She has continued to instruct seminarians on the finer points of preaching the Gospel in her "Teaching and Preaching the Word of God" classes at Notre Dame Seminary and she often conducts classes for the Religious Education Office of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

Her leaving the office of mission education with the Archdiocese was not the end of her involvement with the organizations to which she contributed so greatly during her years with them. For example ...

- She is a consultant for the National Office of the Pontifical Mission Society. She serves on the Education Committee of that group. This gives her an opportunity to share ideas with teachers in classrooms to promote mission animation. She's also their national speaker at N.C.E.A. and other teacher conventions.
- She is also a consultant for Black and Indian Missions. She conducts workshops for Directors on Cultural Awareness and publishes the electronic newsletter for African-Americans and Native Americans which I mentioned earlier. She also heads a committee to try to promote vocations among African-American and Native Americans, male and female.
- Judy also serves as Vice-President of the Board of the U.S. Catholic Mission Association.

And before we forget to mention it, our homespun version of St. Paul travels tirelessly throughout the country addressing members of religious congregations, school groups, members of church parishes, conventioners, etc. She conducts workshops, retreats, gives keynotes, pep talks, you name it. She's been known to address one group in New York on Monday, hop on a plane and conduct a mission in Los Angeles on Wednesday. (At last count, she'd amassed 60,000 bonus travel miles on just one airline in one year!) Unfortunately, there is no record of how many miles she's racked up walking from one concourse to another.

To attend one of her talks is a unique experience. If she is addressing an audience located outside a 100-mile radius of New Orleans, the first reaction is, "Where does she come from?" They expected, of course, to hear the proverbial Southern drawl. They get something entirely different. You must know something of the history of the "Big Easy" to understand. The speech of the less-than-affluent citizenry has been greatly influenced by the waves of immigrants who came to this port city from the mid 1800's to the early 1900's. The Irish, the Italians, the Germans, slaves and free people of color

from the Caribbean - all brought their dialects with them. They blended with the Southern speech and its French influences. The minute Judy starts speaking, its as if Miss Scarlett O'Hara of Tara Plantation outside of Atlanta is locked in mortal combat with Barbra Streisand of Brooklyn, New York for control of her speech. Neither wins; neither loses. How else do you explain "you all" and "who dat" spoken in the same sentence!

Very soon, however, you forget about that. You are enthralled with what she has to say to you. Recently she gave the invocation at a Susan Komen Breast Cancer Foundation Luncheon in New Orleans. When the affair ended, Mitch Landrieu, Mayor of New Orleans, approached her to say that she'd proven that it was possible to completely captivate an audience with just a few words. A friend of mine who recently attended one of her missions remarked how Judy seems to include everyone in her talks. "She has everyone's full attention", she said. "She's very enjoyable to listen to and she has a knack for saying just what you need to hear." It is not uncommon after one of her talks for members of the audience to approach her and pour out their hearts to her. That also happens, weeks after she's made a presentation, when she's seated at a restaurant or simply walking down the street.

It's as if someone lights a fire under her! It may seem strange to compare one of your dearest friends and someone you've admired for years with a RABBIT but she's our Energizer Bunny – she just keeps going, and going and going ... She's hopped from pirogue to pirogue in the bayous of the Cajun country of Louisiana; on and off ferry boats from one small town to another in Alaska, did the hip-hop in a New Orleans ghetto with kids who'd never held a prolonged conversation with a white person, much less a nun, and flown from city to places you've never heard of to bring that message of God's love and hope.

In the Bernard Haring quote previously cited, he spoke of bringing the good news to others by word and life. The thousands who have been blessed to hear her, to experience her dynamism, to have their faith and love of God increased know how effectively she has brought the good news to them by word. The Marianites who are fortunate to have lived with her, can attest to the beauty and dedication of her life.

We often try, in vain, to get Judy to slow down. We do that because we are concerned about her health, her ability to continue the hectic pace. But we do it, also, for a more selfish reason, because we love having her home with us. She is always a delight with her quick wit, her compassionate heart, and her wise counsel. Our efforts to slow her down are, however, in vain. We can't compete with her passion for spreading the Word. That is what drives her, she says.

We know that our experiences in our formative years play a major part in the kind of adults we will become. In case anyone has any doubts about that, just take a look at Sr. Judy Gomila. Bringing the "good news" of God's love and care for us to so many (the cheerleader!); becoming a religious and motivating others to seriously consider a religious vocation (President of the Vocation Club); becoming a truly holy and pious woman (just like Blanche of Castile!); working tirelessly for the missions (president of the CSMC); and editing four publications at one time (Layout Editor of "Wings", her high school newspaper).

We Marianites are so thankful to God that Judy's formative years are bearing such fruit. Our lives, like those of countless seminarians, fishermen in Alaska, Cajuns down the bayou, schoolchildren in untold numbers, audiences around the country, the African-American and Indian communities, our Associates, those who view our website and read our publications – all have been enriched by her presence, by her contagious zeal for the mission, by her creativity, and by her wholehearted passion in spreading the Gospel message. Blanche of Castile and Paul of Tarsus would be so proud!

A Holy Cross Version of St. Paul

Sr. Judith Gomila, msc

SMA! SMA! Yeeaaa SMA!



Ages 3 & 5

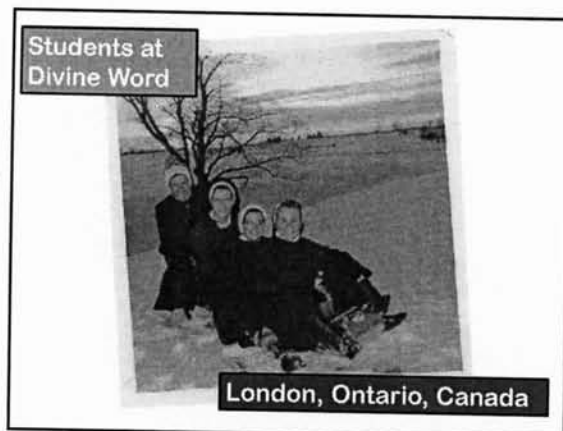
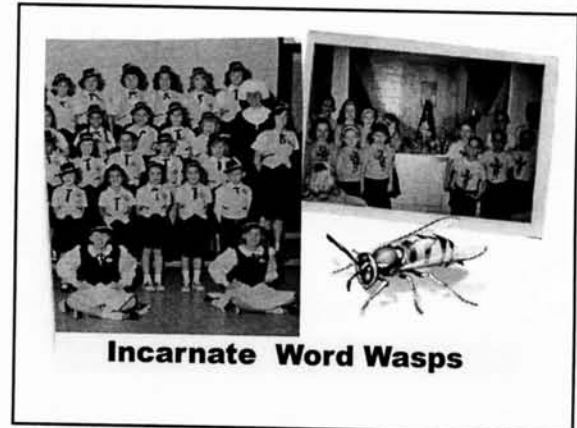
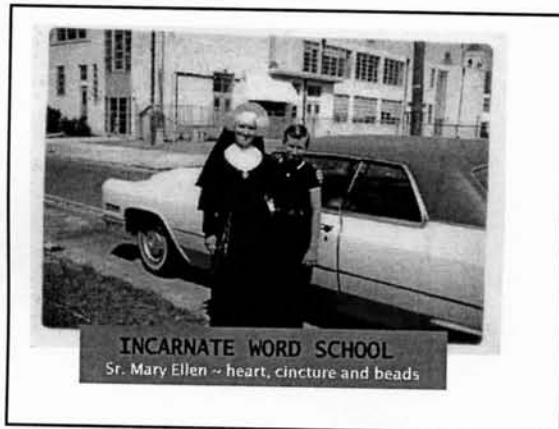
WORLD MISSION SUNDAY 1946



1950

Here's to holy angels, how we love you...





"The poor you will always have with you...." Matt. 26:11

**St. Francis de Sales
Convent Community**

"Love one another as I have loved you..." John 13:34-35



Desire Housing Project

1 sq mile ~ 20,000 people

“My life hurts!”



~ Bread for the World Skit ~
Jackson Square, NOLA



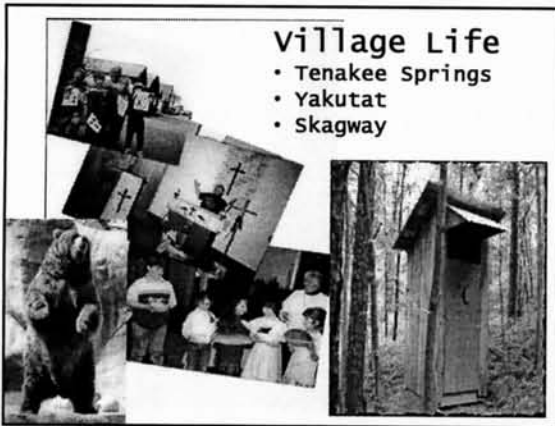
The many faces and costumes... of an old fool for Christ!

1 Cor. 4:10

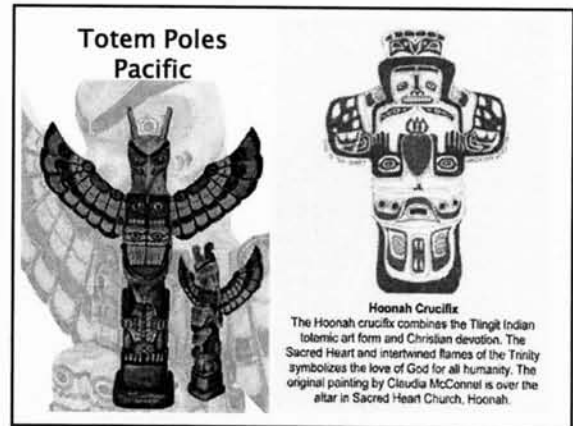


Village Life



- Tenakee Springs
- Yakutat
- Skagway



Totem Poles Pacific



Hoonah Crucifix
The Hoonah crucifix combines the Tlingit Indian totemic art form and Christian devotion. The Sacred Heart and intertwined flames of the Trinity symbolizes the love of God for all humanity. The original painting by Claudia McConnell is over the altar in Sacred Heart Church, Hoonah.





The **Tlingit** are an indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest Coast



Sacred Heart Church, Hoonah
Monthly Mass ...
weather permitting

Wings of Alaska

Pelican Faith Community...
celebrated Mass 4
times a year ...
they were clear on
what it means to
be the
Body of Christ,
the Church.

