**Eulogy for Sister Joanne Skalski,** (given by Sister Liz Koszarek on June 24, 2020)

The movie, Les Miserable, is a story of struggle and pain, commitment and love. As Jean Valjean approaches death, his closing prayer request to Fantine, who preceded him in death, is poignant.

He sings: "Take my hand and lead me to salvation,

Take my love for love is everlasting.

And remember the truth that once was spoken,

**To love another person is to see the face of God."**

As we commend our Sister Joanne Skalski to the loving embrace of God, may we as well, be renewed in hope and the promise of eternal life and peace. We might ask: What is it? -- or more precisely, WHO is it that compels us to embark on our journey of life? Who entices us to new horizons, new pathways and treasured relationships despite the challenges and complexities of life? Is it not our God of mystery, love, and compassion?

When Joanne was a very young child, her mother was called to eternal life. The separation, no doubt, must have had a profound impact in Joanne's life. Yet sustained by a loving family and the mystery of God's love and grace, she developed those characteristics which made her successful in life, loved and respected by so many, open and responsive to God's personal invitation to a life of commitment, love and service as a Sister of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis.

The Jubilee publication of 2013 summarizes the academic achievements and varied ministries of Joanne's gifted life. She has served as:

A teacher in both elementary and secondary education including Prologue Alternative

High School in Chicago.

Assistant, and then acting principal at Maria High School

Assistant provincial

Director of administration for a Catholic Social Service Center in New Orleans

Administrative assistant to the vice-president and president at De Paul University

Director of the Institutional Sponsorship Board for our congregation

Executive secretary for our congregation

And as archives assistant.

Most admirably, throughout her various ministries, she graciously shared God's love with all.

My conversation yesterday with Sister Shawn Lee was especially insightful. She spoke of the significant contribution Sister Joanne made to the viability and well-being of our congregation Throughout the eight years she served as Director of the Institutional Sponsorship Board. It was during the time of transition to congregational unity and concurrent increasing legislation regarding corporate liability in the ownership of properties. It was a blessing that Joanne had served as secretary to Anita Molano, a lawyer, while working at De Paul university since that connection helped to precipitate our congregation's hiring of Anita as our lawyer as well. Through their untiring efforts and expertise, as a congregation we have been protected from both potential and actual lawsuits. In the selling of hospitals in Nebraska, Colorado, and Wisconsin, Joanne tirelessly worked with committees and leaders at each location. At Lourdes, Trinity, and Regina High Schools, she worked toward legal similarities with Boards of Trustees in development of Codes of Organization and requirements for accreditation. And here, in Ohio, joined with Tom Trudel and others in pursuing efforts toward the joining of Marymount Hospital with Cleveland Clinic and the development of this impressive intergenerational campus. In each enterprise Joanne respected the insights and ideas of others, gently shared her wisdom, and maintained a collaborative approach through the process of discernment.

But be assured, while enjoying each of her varied ministries, Joanne celebrated life and friendships. Family, relatives and so many who shared in her life have said that "it was fun" to be with Joanne. She possessed a delightful sense of humor. So let me digress back to a story shared by Sr. Carlene Blavat. In their shared assignment to Blessed Sacrament parish School in Milwaukee, WI, (In the days when we still dressed in full habit) Joanne taught 70 second grade students while Carlene taught 55 first grade students. Dr. Suess' books were favorites of the children. One story read:

Is that your hat? Yes, it's a nice hat.

I like that hat. Do you like that hat?

Yes, I like that hat. It's really a good hat."

It was not unusual for Joanne and Carlene to "lighten the mood of the day" when they had recently washed, ironed and appropriately reset the pins in their veils to banter: "Oh, what a hat! It's a nice hat. I really like your hat."

So how does one who thoroughly enjoys travel, pilgrimages, social gatherings, conversation, all of creation and shared meals, enter into prolonged pain and suffering while still maintaining a positive attitude? Truly, it must be only through the grace, love and compassion of a God who shared the burden, sustaining one in the hope and promise of eternal life and light. Yes, Joanne witnessed in her prolonged years of physical diminishment an admirable resilience, acceptance and composure, combined with a deep sense of gratitude for all who cared for her, all who visited, prayed with and for her.

So now, our dear Sister Joanne, we hold you in loving remembrance and prayer:

Now called to your heavenly home

Now embraced in love by your dear birth mother

Now united with all your loved ones.

As we sang in novitiate:

"May the Lord bless you and keep you:

May the Lord let his face to shine upon you

And be gracious, and be gracious unto you.  
 And give you eternal rest

Eternal peace

Eternal life and joy.