

**Homily for Ruth Conley Funeral Mass at
Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church
Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida
Bishop Felipe J. Estevez
September 23, 2021**

In the Catholic culture to offer the Mass and prayers for our deceased ones is considered a work of mercy. It is good for us to be here in this recently renovated church where Ruth worshipped God each Sunday. Here where she praised and sang boastfully as she always did proudly in a way that she sang like her mother. For us listening to her, it caused us awe at experiencing it so beautifully.

The Scripture heard by us today said: "He will destroy death forever." This is the good news proclamation for all of us to hear with openness. Jesus Christ is Risen - he conquered death as Paul wrote. He is the New Man.

"Behold I am making all things new - write this down for these words are trustworthy and true." The truth that gives hope cannot pass away as the leaves fall in autumn. Christ's Resurrection is the only reason we're here rather than in a social gathering remembering stories of Ruth Conley's life. Let us rejoice and be glad because the Lord saved her and so we hope!

How well the author of the letter to the Hebrews captured the faith that we hold together as our treasure!

When I was invited by her son Paul to preach this homily, I joyfully accepted it because Ruth was my friend. She was a generous supporter of our charities. She invited me often to sit with her for the Messiah performance at the Jacksonville Symphony - such a great benefactor she was to the Symphony. I enjoyed her friendship. I chose this Gospel of Matthew 11, as the scripture passage that best fits this Mass. Why?

Matthew 11:25-30 reveals the heart of Jesus. His heart radiated His praise to the Father in the Holy Spirit of love. Deep down, Ruth Conley's love with music was an encounter with the source of beauty: infinite triune God in his majesty and glory! St. Augustine said, "To sing is to pray twice." Ruth prayed five times! Music brings joy to the world and eases the pain of the human condition. I could easily imagine Ruth's celestial encounter with the Lord Jesus with the sound of Handel's "Alleluia." How right was St. Augustine to say that Easter was a season of praise and song, an anticipation for the age to come in heavenly glory. The Lord's resurrection and glorification shows the life that will be given to us in the future.

And we pray and hope Ruth is enjoying that happiness now. As her Lord promised, "I will give you rest." May she rest in peace!

May she rest in peace indeed. May she sing forever - Alleluia! Let us all praise the Lord! With Padre Pio whose feast the Church celebrates today, we all say, Stay with me Lord! As Padre Pio once said, "With a firm love I will love you with all my heart while on earth and continue to love you perfectly during all eternity." Amen.