

Michael PAKALUK (ed.), *The Appalling Strangeness of the Mercy of God: The Story of Ruth Pakaluk - Convert, Mother & Pro-life Activist*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2011, 272 pp.

A collection of letters and talks by Ruth V.K. Pakaluk, edited and introduced with a biographical overview by her husband, Michael Pakaluk.

Through the letters one gets to know Ruth Pakaluk's remarkable personality, her faith and zest for life; her devotion to her family. The talks are about different aspects of the Christian life, always with "practical tips", as well as two irrefutable pro-life presentations.

*The Appalling Strangeness of the Mercy of God* begins with the story of two self-styled atheist Harvard undergraduates who find and embrace Christianity. "We both believed that the best way to tell if Christianity were true would be to try to live as a Christian" (p. 23).

They were married in 1978 while still at College, and eventually became Catholics. They were blessed with seven children one of whom died in infancy.

Introduced to *The Way* by a friend, they fell in love with it "because its message seemed so fresh, youthful, and at the same time demanding" (p. 41). In 1987 both joined Opus Dei. "Since the time we became Catholics we had sensed the need for some kind of external assistance in our efforts to pray regularly and grow in the interior life... Opus Dei seemed exactly what we were looking for" (*idem*).

Ruth Pakaluk became a dedicated pro-lifer. She was a founder member of the Harvard-Radcliffe Human Rights Advocates and later the Cambridge Unborn Rights Advocates (CURA) which became the Cambridge chapter of the state pro-life organization, Massachusetts Citizens for Life (MCFL). She appeared many times on TV and radio to comment on current events as MCFL president, and debated widely on university campuses (p. 39). She also developed a program called Life Education Awareness Project (LEAP) to help high school teachers give pro-life talks (p. 49).

Ruth Pakaluk was also a dedicated homemaker. Even after she was diagnosed with cancer "except for a few days when she might be incapacitated from her illness, Ruth ran the household, shopped, did the laundry, and cleaned. She did the usual share of chauffeuring children..." (p. 55).

In 1993 the cancer metastasized. "Ruth's response to this news was conversion and greater confidence in God" (p. 52). She continued with all her activities. She died on 23 September 1998 at the age of 41.

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