

Sister Eleanore Hillenbrand, OSB Funeral Mass
Reflection by Sister Judith Murphy, OSB
Saturday, November 2, 2019

Good morning!

We come together this morning to remember and pray for our Sister Eleanore, who has gone before us into eternal life. And we do this in the midst of a holy season of the year filled with rich messages and metaphors. Liturgical feasts and seasons of the Church year can also reflect the stages of our growth and development in our own lives and life as Christian people.

These days, from Halloween to the feasts of All Saints and today's feast of All Souls, lead us toward the feast of Christ the King at the end of November. These feasts bring us again to a renewed awareness that we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, those who have gone before us in this life of faith ---in our families and in our communities. It is a time to wholeheartedly sing the Litany of All the Saints—and gradually add more and more names to the list—trusting that eventually our own names will be added, as well. In the Rule of St. Benedict, we are advised to keep death daily before our eyes. Also, we trust that our monastic life is an instance, an intensification of our life as baptized people, as people learning and striving to be Christian people.

Sister Eleanore, we are told, felt called to this community as a very young girl. She asked and was allowed to come to this Benedictine community when she was starting high school. How did she experience that call? What would it have meant to her to come to the monastery at that young age? It would be hard to say, and I won't try. We know that St. Benedict describes the monastery as a school of the Lord's service. We come to this community as a kind of local church, in which, like other people of faith, we strive to live and grow together in light of the teachings of Jesus, learning to be people of love.

We take two distinctive vows as Benedictines, the vow of *Conversion Through a Monastic Way of Life*, and *Stability*. Our vow of *Conversion through a Monastic Way of Life*, lets us live daily in a life of work and prayer in mutual support and service....and, some say, to get our rough edges worn down and softened by rubbing against each other in our daily interactions. And the other Benedictine vow of *Stability* commits us to this particular group of people to do this monastic life with. An Australian writer and teacher about monasticism, Michael Casey, says that *Stability* cautions us about delaying love until we find that the community deserves it. Community is our workshop for learning what it takes to become, and becoming, loving persons. What would a 13-year-old know about that? Not so much as she would know at 95-years of age when she came to die.

Baptism and Monastic Life are life choices that call us to honor and follow the teachings of Jesus, that keep the message of Jesus alive in real time, in varied times, in our own times. The message of Jesus: Love One Another. And we recall that Pope Francis hopes to see the

Church as a Field Hospital in our days when there is so much need for learning to Love One Another.

Conversion through this life, and a stable commitment to this particular group of people.... It is a life that may be difficult to talk about. Thomas Merton taught his novices at Gethsemane that the monastery was a school for learning about mercy, the mercy of God and mercy towards one another. Praying the psalms together over a lifetime steeps us in an overwhelming sense of God's mercy. And in our daily living together, we see in each other and ourselves our daily need for forgiveness and mercy, and the ongoing need to experience asking for both.

Our gospel reading today gives us another take on Jesus' teaching about "Love One Another." Jesus tells how his disciples (and we) will be judged. He sets up an imaginative scene in which the standard for discipleship is not simply faith, but also the kind of faith that calls and transforms the disciple (us) to become aware of and responsive to the basic needs of our fellow humans---in our family, our community, and our sphere of influence, learning that our behavior toward other people is considered as behavior toward God.

We celebrate and are grateful for Jesus, our gentle shepherd who is living bread, the bread of life that nourishes us to become also like him,... willing to be body broken and blood poured out in many ways, not least of which in ministry such as teaching, and sharing what we have received, as Sister Eleanore did so well.

St. Benedict says this way of life may seem narrow and constricting at first but the Rule of Benedict promises that over time we will come to "run in the ways of God's commands." Even though as that becomes our reality, we may not look much like we are running *at all*, sometimes even struggling to walk.

So today as we pray in gratitude for our Sister Eleanore's life and for our life together, we pray also to be refreshed and renewed in our commitment and choices as followers of Jesus. May she and we be blessed with fullness of life.