

Sister Joan Hentges' Funeral Mass

Reflection by Sister Judith Murphy, OSB

May 22, 2017

In mid-June Joan was to have received the Spirit of St. Scholastica Award, together with Sister Benita, to honor their nurturing work with the Oblate program of our Benedictine community. In preparation for that event, Joan was asked: What does the Spirit of St. Scholastica mean to you? She answered: "Living out the wonderful charism of Benedict: stability, humility: you just can't go wrong. I realize that more and more as I work with the Oblates, which brings me to greater depth of understanding!"

Stability and Humility: Stability –that sometimes misunderstood Benedictine vow—whereby we commit to stay put. Not so much in a geographic place or building; more, to stay put with a group, a community, with whom to seek God together, in prayer and work, day to day life, over a lifetime. The Australian monk Michael Casey says stability "discourages us from deferring love until we find a community worthy of it." In other words, it is this community in which we learn to live together in mutuality and learn to love--stability. Casey also says that the Rule of Benedict does not act directly upon community regimen, but rather on the minds and hearts of monastics. This community life supports growth in humility, too: In this day to day life, in relationships together, we can learn the truth about life and the truth about ourselves. Humility involves truth, a right understanding of ourselves and others.

This evening we heard the scriptures proclaimed:

---the souls of the just are in the hands of God; they are at peace.

---Be ready and willing to give an explanation when people notice how hopeful and joyful you are;

---and, part of Jesus' farewell discourse: I am going away, but I will not leave you orphaned. I will come to you. My Father will give you another Advocate, the Spirit of Truth. You will come to know that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you.

A community of believers formed around the early believers in Jesus, and around the Word, eventually becoming a church. Joan saw herself as a woman of the Church.

Michael Casey also says that the “tools of the monastic life” amount to the daily and hourly practical fulfillment of the Hebrew and Christian scriptural commandments, which instruct people to honor God above all, to resist selfishness, and to do good for others. This was so much part and parcel of how and what Joan taught to so many in her years of ministry and teaching, wherever she served.

A friend in Colorado wrote this way about Joan’s work at Christ the King Parish: “Hundreds and hundreds of families were visited in their home when their children were going to make their First Communion. She went to every home and spread the joy and importance of the sacrament. Sister Joan left a footprint for Pueblo’s Catholics.” ...for the whole diocese, too. Another wrote that “now Joan is so happy, like she always was! Rejoice! Let her be an example for us.”

In 2009, there was a play written, an original theater performance portraying Pueblo and its people; it was called SENIOR MOMENTS. Joan was interviewed so that her life could be included in the production. The script for her part was found in our Archives. Here are a few selections:

--“I have been a nun for more than half a century. Nuns may be thought of as acquiescent, conservative, humble, quiet, obedient. I am none of these. I believe a nun is just like everyone else and deserves...no, *must* have strong opinions on life. No one can say I didn’t let my opinions be known....”

---“Papa always said, ‘We are shaped by our family of origin.’ In our house there were two constant images....Jesus and FDR, sometimes I didn’t know which was first. We were an opinionated, active family. Another thing Papa said: ‘You only walk this way but once; you better make a difference.’”

---Another selection: “I can’t tell you what an enriching experience it is to nurture to the needs of children, to teach them about Jesus, who became the savior of the world, to ready them for their First Communion, and then years later, when they come back to me with their children, I start the process all over again.”

It seems appropriate that Joan would leave this earthly life in this time when we celebrate Jesus’ Ascension. In truth, I think we could celebrate her life in any and all of the mysteries of

Christ's life, from the Incarnation, through the Triduum, and on to Pentecost. She was steeped in all these facets of Jesus' life and the liturgical celebrations of them throughout the Church year that help us grow into being sons and daughters of God, too. Repetition of these celebrations year after year brings us along into deeper understanding and appreciation of our own lives which are also being taken into the mysteries of Jesus.

Joan was also a woman of Vatican II, that was such an important part of her life and understanding of the Church. Richard Gaillardetz, the author of "An Unfinished Council: Vatican II, Pope Francis, and the Renewal of Catholicism," writes of how integral is the Ascension is to the Easter story. He reminds us that in Catholic teaching the Paschal Mystery refers to Christ's suffering, death, resurrection, and *ascension into heaven*.

He says two important Christian convictions flow from this: First, in ascending to the "right hand" of God, Jesus brought his full humanity—the totality of all that he experienced, lived, and loved on earth—into the fullness of the divine reality. All that we humans experience, our hopes and fears, what delights us, and what terrifies us is now forever embraced and transformed through Christ, in the divine life of God. Second, we too hear the angels' question, "Why do you stand, looking upward?" Henceforth like his followers, we too are to encounter and carry Christ in a new way. As St. Paul puts it, "we encounter Christ through the eyes of our hearts now in a new way. The eyes of our hearts can see that Jesus is now encountered through the sacraments, through the preaching of God's Word, through the work for justice, and through the proffering of mercy." In the community of faith, we encounter and carry him now as the one "who fills all things in every way."

Again, Joan's character in Senior Moments says, "All of life, I think, is a summation of grateful memories and forgiven failures. That certainly sums up my life." And she says Papa, "Doc" Hentges who loved baseball, had another theory. He used to say to me, "Joanie, the game of life is like baseball: you win some, you lose some, and some are rained out...but you suit up for every game. It's in the suiting up every day, that a person's worth is measured."

We can imagine Joan saying now: "Well Papa, I've tried to make a difference. I suited up every day. Let's play ball."