Funeral Homily: Sister Alice Reckamp – August 18, 2021

{On behalf of this community I want extend sympathy to Alice’s family: Ruth, Peg, Melvin & Tom, and to their families and those of Alice’s deceased brothers and sisters. You are in our prayers and our hearts at this time.}

No holy place is truly innocent. Every sacred place holds its own beauty, its particular spirit, and above all a tangible and profound meaning for all those who inhabit it and who gaze upon it with the eyes of faith.

Here in this chapel there is, of course a place for font, table and ambo, - holy things, and a place for an assembly, - holy people.

These are more than liturgical symbols; they offer to us the very traces of God’s presence in our lives. They are vessels of a love we never quite grasp, but always hunger for; they have the power to transform us because it is really God in Jesus who seeks to fashion us into living word of God, the very Body of Christ.

We have also set aside a space within this place, a place of honor. Over here, in front of this screen, we placed our Advent wreath, a sign of our waiting for the birth of the Messiah, the redeemer of us all. And we placed there the crèche, the sign of his birth, and ours, for we are called to share his life. And we placed there the signs of Holy Week, those markers that draw us into the glorious mystery of death and resurrection, his and ours.

And today we have placed the casket of our sister Alice, for it is a place of honor, and our liturgy today is a testament of our love and our honor for her. For it is true to say that the most striking of all signs is the human image; - the persons we love and who love us. We are the traces of God for each other, moving about in the world of our brothers and sisters. Holy things and holy people come together in this place, in our memories, in our stories and in our hearts.

All of these signs, like the objects that hold the stories of Alice’s life, bear the weight of mystery, and at the same time give tangible witness of the friendship we share with the risen Christ, and the bond of affection we have for Alice and for each other.

But there are other places and events that shape our lives, and when we embrace them with an unwavering faith we see the mystery of God unfold before us.

Alice would have seen all that the author of Ecclesiastes spoke about, the birthing and the dying, the weeping and the laughing, the speaking and the silence, the war and the peace, - and so much more, and she would have been able to gaze on all that with a faith that said the hand of God was somehow there in every part. She could see as God sees.

Who would have been open, in their very early years, to even imagine going into the Amazon of Brazil to teach and to heal? Alice would.
And who would let go of an extra tunic, or shoes, or a purse in order to take up residence among so many who needed so much so far away? Alice would.

And who would trust what God had in store for a little woman from Wheeling for the next 44 years? Alice would.

She was a true follower of Francis, listening, teaching, healing, and through all of that simply offering a ministry of presence with that quiet sense of assurance that all would be well.

And if there was need for physical intervention she could find blood for anyone. Martha has shared a story about how Alice was known for her live blood bank, a list of people who would give blood at a moment’s notice, and they would come forward because Sister Alice had asked. Even Martha was not immune from Alice’s call in the middle of the night to give up much needed blood. It is said that a person asked Alice what type of blood she needed and she responded, “red”. How many lives she saved in this manner.

But the spiritual gift she offered was a space for others to find within themselves a sacred place for God, no pressure, just presence. Her embrace of her ministry was like a great tent that brought comfort and peace, a shroud that was a sign of the unconditional love that God has for everyone, no exception.

When her own tent, as Paul calls our human bodies, became fragile, weakened by her remarkable journey, she never accepted that as a reason to give up, or an excuse to withhold a gesture of service, even a simple one.

No one could fight so stubbornly with one of those mechanical matches with the fierce determination that she could muster, and win. She didn’t convert to matches without a fight.

In the last few years those of us here at Our Lady of Angels chapel benefitted from her care of the table where the mystery of Eucharistic presence unfolded. And she took up a new mission, with Martha, taking food to the residents of Canticle place on a regular basis. It was her way of living Eucharist. It is our prayer that she will now enjoy the banquet of the risen Christ, prepared by the one she served with such dignity and grace.

Phil Horrigan