

Funeral Homily for Josephine Flaherty

Homily for Josephine Flaherty – June 5 2015

My God, What a life!

I recall a paragraph on a card which was quoting the famous Dominican priest, Lacordaire and the last sentence referring to the life of his friend: My God, what a life!

Josephine has certainly lived life to the fullest. She has experienced so much: in a changing world and in a changing church. Transition and adaptation from one job to another, from one ministry to the next.

Josephine was former Principal Nursing Officer of Canada, former Dean of the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Western Ontario, and a past president of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. She was a significant pillar here at St.

Joseph's Parish, always intent on what is best for the growth and life of St. Joe's.

Let me suggest 3 images that I believe would personify Josephine.

The first image, a woman of joy. I have heard people say of her that she

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had a great sense of humor. She was funny. She could probably repeat the words of John Quincy Adams, 6th President of the U.S., who said on his death bed:

"I inhabit a weak, frail, decayed tenement; battered by the winds and broken in on by the storms, and from all I can learn, the landlord does not intend to repair."

Every gesture, every word, every look says something: Let it say, "I'm happy to be here, happy to be with you." But not only with friends, in a wheelchair or on a hospital bed, on the phone or at a party, wherever, people sensed the joy and happiness of Josephine.

The second image, a woman for others. There is a cute saying: you save a life and you are a hero, you save a thousand lives and you are a nurse. Yes, indeed Josephine always gave herself totally in her jobs, in her friendships. Josephine was a raconteur, well known for her opinions and pronouncements; and never shy about getting into a hard "discussion". Her stories included challenging a Cardinal – which she enjoyed telling, but also the many stories from her time as a Red Cross outpost nurse. Many will remember the one about birthing the twins in the canoe, in the rapids on the way to the hospital.

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You may remember hearing about the German Lutheran Bonhoeffer who died in 1945 in a concentration camp. One of his prison poems is titled "Stations on the road to freedom." The third of his stations was very pertinent to Josephine as it is for we, the grey-haired crowd.

He said: "A change has come indeed. Your hands, so strong and active, are bound; in helplessness now you see your action is limited; you sigh in relief, your cause committing to stronger hands, so now you may rest contented. Only for one blissful moment you draw near to touch freedom; then, that it might be perfected in glory, you gave it to God."

The third image, a woman of prayer. I do not only mean the symbolism that Josephine would have taken from the words of consecration: "Jesus took us, blessed us, broke us, and gave us" a true relationship of love. I am sure that in Josephine's 81 years that relationship of love truly existed.

But in her last months and days, Josephine could not be "for others" as she once was.

I am reminded that over 150 years ago, Ralph Waldo Emerson delivered an address to the graduating class of Harvard in which he said in part: "The true Christian can always be known by this: that she or he deals out to the people her or his life - life passed through the fire of thought."

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And so Josephine, woman of Joy, woman for others, woman of prayer,
such is your privilege and your burden.

I would like to end with this story.

When an old man died in a nursing home, it was believed that he had
nothing left of any value.

Later, when the nurses were going through his meagre possessions, They
found this poem.

What do you see nurses? ...

What are you thinking ... when you're looking at me?

A cranky old man, ... not very wise,

Who dribbles his food ... and makes no reply.

Who seems not to notice ... the things that you do.

And forever is losing ... A sock or shoe?

With bathing and feeding ... The long day to fill?

Is that what you're thinking? ... Is that what you see?

Nurse , you're not looking at me.

I'll tell you who I am ... As I sit here so still,

I'm a small child of Ten ... with a father and mother,

Brothers and sisters ... who love one another

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A young boy of Sixteen ... with wings on his feet
Dreaming that soon now a lover he'll meet.
A groom soon at Twenty ... my heart gives a leap.
Remembering, the vows ... that I promised to keep.
At Twenty-Five, now ... I have young of my own.
Who need me to guide ... And a secure happy home.
At Fifty, once more. ... Babies play 'round my knee,
Again, we know children ... My loved one and me.
Dark days are upon me ... My wife is now dead.
I look at the future ... I shudder with dread.
I'm now an old man ... and nature is cruel.
It's jest to make old age ... look like a fool.
The body, it crumbles ... grace and vigour, depart.
There is now a stone ... where I once had a heart.
But inside this old carcass . A young man still dwells,
And now and again ... my battered heart swells
I remember the joys ... I remember the pain.
And I'm loving and living ... life over again.
I think of the years, all too few ... gone too fast.
And accept the stark fact ... that nothing can last.
So open your eyes, people ... open and see.

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Not a cranky old man.

Look closer ... see ... ME!!

Yes with such memories, with such actualities, we can indeed say anew:

"Yes my God, yes indeed, what a life!"