

March 31, 2018

In Memoriam: Beverly O' Rourke

(November 12, 1929 – March 25, 2018)

Accepting the loss of yet another beloved member of the congregation, as we sorrowfully say our farewells to Bev O'Rourke, whose earthly life came to a close last Sunday, is far from easy.

Yet, once again, this is our sacred task.

Jan, our rector, and the devoted parishioners who have assisted her in providing pastoral care to Bev can tell you that Bev's courage and perseverance in dealing with the long drawn-out illness that finally took her from us have been remarkable.

Lucy and I can remember, back when I was filling in here at St. John's, making a pastoral call on Bev one week, only to see her back in church a week or two later, if she could possibly gather the strength.

Bev simply did not give up in the face of adversity, and what counted for her in life was being able to be there for her family, her friends, her neighbors, her church, whenever she could.

She would be pleased that we will be gathering in Whitlock Hall for food and fellowship and to share memories immediately following this service because, as someone who cheerfully conspired in hosting many such receptions at St. John's over the years, gracious hospitality is a virtue Bev prized.

Nor would she mention it, if her practiced eye spied something a little out of place because more important to her than anything else was knowing that everyone was having a good time.

Indeed, whether hosting an elegant dinner party with all the trimmings or having a bunch of Joe's students over for the evening, Bev enjoyed entertaining and knew how to do it with style.

I'm told that she and Shirley Oest liked to compare notes about what they deemed proper for every social occasion.

(I wonder, having a fair idea of the temperaments of these two spirited ladies, just how often they agreed!)

What I remember most about that formidable pair was being on the stage with them in *Arsenic and Old Lace* back in the 1970's, when they played those slightly demented sisters of mercy intent on putting grieving gentleman callers out of their misery.

(I also remember politely declining any elderberry wine either one of them might have offered me after the show!)

Of course, working and acting and getting people involved in campus and community theater could hardly not have been one of Bev's main passions, if not her main passion, considering how, I understand from Jerry, she and Joe came to meet: on the stage at the University of Missouri, where Joe was pacing back and forth, concentrating on learning his lines to the point that Bev, high above, had to yell down at him to look out for the bank of lights she was dropping into place, a rather dramatic encounter, if you will, which led to their lasting romance and years of working together in stage productions wherever they happened to be.

Clearly, Bev's keen interest in the performing arts influenced how she chose to live out her Christian faith once she became a member of St. John's.

In addition to being active in the leadership of the Women's Guild, where the focus was on community service projects, as well as on coordinating parish hospitality, Bev sang in the choir and took her turn assisting in Sunday worship, mindful, I am sure, of how integral the talents and skills honed in the performing arts are to enhancing the ceremonies of the Church and enriching the spiritual growth of God's people.

Christians believe there is a life that transcends this mortal life and that God, who is always with us, will be with us in that life as well, a life that has been variously described as eternal life, the resurrection of the dead, and, as a way to suggest that it has always surrounded and enclosed us, "the larger life".

We really don't know a lot of specifics about this "larger life", whose fullness we believe our sister Bev now enjoys, though I think most all of us have our expectations, some more fanciful than

others, loosely based on images we're familiar with from the Bible and the Prayer Book, but possibly also from popular literature that may not be as reliable.

We've heard some passages from Holy Scripture earlier in this service which may not be able to answer every question we may have about the life to come, but they do give us glimpses of what our sister Bev may already be experiencing and what we, too, can hope to experience, as we continue our own faith-journeys.

Our first reading from *The Wisdom of Solomon*, found in the Apocrypha, a body of writings which appeared between the Hebrew Scriptures that we call "The Old Testament" and the New Testament, assures us that our sister Bev is now at peace.

"...the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them."

Since, according to the apostle Paul, all have been declared righteous through the self-sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, every one of God's children can lay claim to that promise.

The writer of *Wisdom* takes pains to concede that life has not always been easy for the righteous, as we know that it was not always easy for Bev, who was obliged to endure the ravages of debilitating illness, but knew that the same God who has led her to the joys of heaven, was with her and sustained her through every trial.

Our lesson from *The Revelation to John* invites us to visualize what Archbishop Desmond Tutu has frequently called “God’s Dream for God’s People”, when the truth of our relationship with God will no longer be obscured, in the words of the apostle Paul, by “confusing images in a mirror”, and we will finally see “face to face”.

“See,” the writer of *Revelation* proclaims, “The home of God is among mortals,” affirming God’s personal solidarity with every human being.

In spite of the Cross and indeed because of the Cross, God in Christ seeks to be friends with us, and come the resurrection, promised to our sister Bev and to every other child of God, death

“will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for [all those things will] have passed away.”

“Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away,” Jesus states in the passage we heard from the Gospel according to John, “for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of [the one] who sent me. And this is the will of [the one] who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that [has been given to me], but raise it up on the last day.”

What Jesus and the writer of John’s Gospel describe is a loving God, a welcoming God, a convivial God, if you will, who is determined to preserve and transform every particle of creation solely out of sheer love.

The Holy Eucharist, which we will share in together later on in this service, is the outward and visible sign of God’s inexhaustible hospitality, a foretaste, as we will say after receiving the bread and wine of Communion, of God’s heavenly banquet, the banquet to which every one of us can one day expect to be invited.

Our sister Bev has gratefully accepted her invitation, and if, when she takes her place, she should happen to offer, ever the gracious hostess, to help prepare the table, there's no question that she would see that it was done properly and lovingly to the glory of God.

--The Rev. Bill Wieland