

Donnybrook

23 November 2021

Funeral Mass for Phyllis Corbally

Welcome

Welcome to everyone again to the church of the Sacred Heart, in Donnybrook. We are here to mark the death of Phyllis beloved wife of Al, a mother, step-mother, grandmother, step-grandmother, aunt and friend. Again, let me extend my own sympathy and that of the parish community to all who mourn Phyllis.

Topic

We are here to entrust Phyllis to the God of the living in whom she firmly believed all her life, the God for whom all are alive.

Steps

The formality of a funeral marks a stage is saying goodbye, always deeply felt and painful. The failure of the mind over a number of years tiggers, in its own way, a kind of gradual loss and bereavement even before the person is gone. The wife and mother, step mother and grandmother that you knew and loved slowly faded – unfortunately not an uncommon experience. Still the shock of death and the experience of bereavement puts you all in a special time in the months ahead. One of tasks ahead will be the recovery of Phyllis you knew and loved, so that the immediate experience of the last difficult years won't dominate the healing of memory. The first reading may be of help: there is a time to be born and a time to die.

In that healing of memory, conversation and time together in the months and years ahead will be important. Especially photos are a great help – a good photo doesn't just capture a moment but can capture something of the person. In conversation with the family and from a few photos, Phyllis was warm, engaging, active and loving. What was not in the photos I saw was the resilience, that staying power to come through past tragedies. These things always leave their mark – but, as we know, it is possible to discover love again and to learn how to live again.

The second reading and the Gospel put love at the centre of our lives. I'm often reminded of a very short poem by Raymond Carver called Late Fragment. It goes like this:

And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on the earth.

It is clear that this was true for Phyllis, who was beloved on the earth. Love really is at the heart of who we are as human beings before God. It is also at the heart of who God is, for God is love and those who live in love, live in God and God lives in them.

Conclusion

Having faith in God makes all the difference at the time of loss. We know that Phyllis was blessed with a wholesome faith in God, in particular a devotion to the Sacred Heart and to Padre Pio. This means we can follow the advice of St Paul, who wrote to the little community in Thessalonica in these words:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13 NRSV)

Of course we grieve, but differently in faith, in hope and in love. Earlier in the first letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote beautiful words:

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9 NRSV)

The fact that the next life is beyond our experience is beside the point. It is enough to know that those who are gone from us are with the Lord. With thoughts such as these we can comfort one another.