

IN NOMINE JESU

GENUINE SACRIFICIAL LOVE

Our homily for this day in which the Church remembers God's grace in keeping Donna Marie Bond His child in holy baptism from life into life is drawn from this day's inspired readings. Hear how her Christian life has been guided through these divine words:

Let the sacrificial love be without hypocrisy. Continually despise the evil; be glued together with the good.¹

Family and friends of Donna Bond, hear and receive the blessing of the One True God Whose genuine love has led our sister in the Faith to His eternal verdant pastures and quiet waters:

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

On November 2, 2014, Donna with her beloved Jack, declared solemn vows before God and the members of this Christian congregation. They were able to give their word of assent because they had received God's Word of promise. They promised they would, by the grace of God, continue steadfast in hearing the Word of God and receiving His sacramental gifts. They committed to hold to this confession of the Faith, and Church, and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it.

Today we celebrate the reality that God has kept His Word to Donna. He held Donna close to Himself through His Word and Sacraments to the end of her mortal life. That means that she is, even now, receiving all the benefits of God's sacrificial love. Such we have confessed in today's Psalm. Reflect a moment on the promise for all, a realized promise for your dear loved one, revealed in these words:

*In green pastures He will cause me to lie down;
upon still waters He leads me.²*

¹ Romans 12:9.

² Psalm 23:2

Words like those have long been declared to evoke images of God's care for His people. From the Psalm, the first image which may come forth is of reclining fluffy, white, sheep. They are beheld in peaceful repose in lush green grass. There is nothing, and no one in that scriptural visage, to cause them any anxiety, want, or fear.

Near them are quiet waters. There is not a ripple to scare them. They have not even done what sheep have been known to do; soil and muddy their own waters.

That is an idyllic picture, which has not likely been beheld by most of you in this place today. After all, while some of you may have animals – goats and horses even – sheep farming is not part of our local culture. So what then might we liken this image of God's care for His faithful people, in this life and into the perfect eternal life in Christ?

Donna, with Jack, have been wanting to take a river cruise for a long time. In this cruise, they were not thinking of taking a rubber raft down the Colorado River. No, their image of such a tranquil time is found in the video clips like those of seen in the advertisements for Viking River Cruises. There long, slender ships with glassed-in sides glide along smooth rivers. The beautiful banks roll by, the sun shines, and all is well. There is elegant dining aboard, and wonders are revealed at each river bend and stop.

That was the Bond's dream together. For Jack, it is a vision to still be fulfilled in this life. For his beloved wife of almost 50 years, it is a beautiful, but pale picture of that which she now beholds in the Presence of her Good Shepherd.

Sheep and ships, green grass and untroubled waters, today's Psalm presents an image of tranquility and repose. All the cares of sheep and passengers are met by their Good Shepherd and Captain. Around, in, and about them there is nothing to stir them up.

That is more than a pretty picture. That is due to the reality that God is the Shepherd and Captain in those scenes. He goes before his people. He is amidst His people. He is behind His people. He surrounds His people.

That describes life for God's people, seen in opaque scenes in this mortal life, behold with clarity as one enters fully into the glorious Presence of the Lord. For our benefit, God has given us the ability to participate in that heavenly realm while on earth. Such were mentioned earlier as hearing God's Word and receiving His Sacraments. Another section of the Word of God for today calls out to us, even in the midst of our real loss:

But all of you seek first the Kingdom [of the God] and the righteousness of Him, and these things, all, will be added to you all.³

A couple of people present today know that verse was actually chosen by Donna's family for you to hear today. These words served to inform the selection of all the other readings you have heard today. In them is a call to those who are troubled by the things of this world, whose lives are not full of the tranquility of green pastures and quiet waters. They are to be declared to people like us, whose world has been disrupted by the falling asleep in Christ of a loved family member. We are reminded to seek the kingdom of God before all things, even matters of food, clothing, health, and mortal life.

This, our beloved Donna, moved by the Spirit of God, working through His Word, did these past few months. After, the Bonds were reminded that this congregation provides pastoral care to her sick and hospitalized. They learned that our pastors visit in hospitals, rehab centers, and nursing homes – they called upon us in times of need.

Donna, who had been so attentive to the care and education of her students through many years of teaching, became a student herself again. She learned

³ Matthew 6:33

anew, and in depth of the Teacher's – Jesus' – care for her through human instruments. In our visits, we shared God's gifts – forgiveness, His loving Word, His touch in the Sacrament of the Altar – at times with a guest or so in attendance.

On one of those home visits, a young woman member of this congregation who was to attend seminary for Deaconess studies was present. She was receiving some training in visitation and the sharing of God's Word in the home. As our conversation before hearing the Word of God and receiving His gifts progressed, it dawned on the young woman that the mature woman she was visiting had been her second grade teacher many years ago. Both lives were touched by the renewed interaction, as the retired teacher rejoiced to be learning of God's grace from the student. That soon-to-be finished with her seminary classes Deaconess' remembrance of Mrs. Bond may be found on Vistoso Memorial Chapel's electronic guestbook.

Had both those women not been seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness in Jesus Christ, they may never have been reunited in this life. Because they had been drawn together in the common confession of the Faith, the teacher was able to rejoice that her student was becoming a teacher of the Faith. We may know that to be true because the subject we were there that day to discuss was Jesus the Christ, their, my, and your Savior (whether you believe that or not).

Then, gathered around a collapsible wooden TV table, simply covered with a white linen, we rejoiced together – and with all the company of God's holy ones in heaven. On that linen stood a little wooden cross with the image of the price God paid to save us from our sins – all the thoughts, words, and deeds which we had done which did not meet His revealed standards. Before the image which displays the objective truth of Jesus' words, "It is finished!" stood a small silver and gold chalice, a simple tiny gold-colored plate, a hinged container of bits of

circular flat bread, and a small plastic vial of red wine.

Then, with the invocation of the Name of God, we were, unseen to us, surrounded by the host of Heaven. As in this service today, from Word to Word we were built into one, receiving God's unconditional love. At the reading of the Gospel, Jesus spoke to us, through the lips of a man. He declared to us our end state in this life and of the eternal life that is ours in Christ Jesus.

An image of where we are all headed in this life stands before us today. It is veiled under a new white pall, behind a wreath of fresh cut flowers. Because Donna had been washed with the water and the Word long ago, her remains are covered with that which is reserved for the saints of God. It is fitting that the word, PAX, "Peace" stands under the cross on that veil, for in her Baptism God declared her at peace with Him and her brothers and sisters in Christ in all the world, for all time. He gave her the light of life – symbolized in the lamp under the other arm of that cross. He anointed her with the Holy Spirit and gave her the joy of gladness for all the times of her life.

That all stands next to the Baptismal font. It is a reminder to us, that she who died with Christ in Holy Baptism so long ago, was raised to life in Him then. He kept her in His Faith and favor through all the years of her life. He even used her, and Jack, in her time of declining health and days of dying, to bring others to new life in Him. She, who had been anointed with the oil of gladness, a symbol of the Holy Spirit so long ago, had been anointed with the oil of gladness, a symbol of the healing that God promises through prayer, as her earthly days ended.

Those same elements – the saving Word the water made into a River of Life, and the symbolic oil – used by God in Donna's family just days before she received fully the crown of life. Here, surrounded by witnesses, human and spiritual, Jonathan and Jillian, Lillian and Linnea, received the gift of new life in Christ. We rejoiced together that from death comes life. By God's grace, a

grandmother's (and grandfather's) dearest desire for her family was fulfilled by God. He sealed His love in them, even as He brought His love to completion in her. On earth, that multiple family member baptism was a fulfillment of God's Word for today:

*Let the sacrificial love be without hypocrisy. Continually despise the evil; be glued together with the good.*⁴

Today, in response to God's Word which the family chose, you are here because of the sacrificial love to which Donna responded. She who had received and lived under God's grace and mercy, and really experienced them in these past few months, shared the gift of the Faith she had been given. With the simple washing of regeneration and renewal God glued His chosen together with the Good – that is Jesus our Lord. They, and all the baptized are affixed to Christ who has died and has been raised from the dead. That means that all who die in Him will be raised to blessed eternal life on the Last Day.

Dear ones, God has sought you to hear Him speak to you. He used the means of Donna's passing from life to full everlasting life to bring you to this place at this time. He Who is coming to you now through His proclaimed Word, is preparing you that He might come to you through His visible Word.

You who have been called to seek first the Lord and His kingdom: look to where He has promised to be! He is here, veiled for you in means you may handle. With Him are the hosts of heaven. Among them now is numbered Saint Donna Marie Bond. Whenever you come to a communion rail such as this, look to its disappearing arms and remember that they continue unseen around the other side. There, those who have fallen asleep in Christ are reclining. There, the tranquility and repose of this day's Psalm is an eternal reality for them. The waters about them are still, their pastures are green. They no longer are troubled. They no

⁴ Romans 12:9.

longer sin. Theirs is not a meal for sinners, but a meal for those who are the eternally saved.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Easter III, Saturday

Psalm 23, Isaiah 51:7-8; Romans 12:9-15; Matthew 6:19-34

April 16, 2016

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA