

GOD HOLDS HER IN HIS ABIDING PRESENCE

Our sermon for this Saturday of Trinity XI, this day the Church in this place has chosen to remember the faith that God gave to and sustained in His servant Elizabeth “Betty” Ahrens, is taken from the Gospel of St. John. Hear the Word of God:

For this remains the will of the One sending Me: that each one having been given to Me, I will not destroy from [eternity], but I will resurrect him {in} the Last Day.¹

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

On April 18th, 2012 the triumphant cry, “He is risen!” was recalled as readings agreed upon by Betty Ahrens and her pastor sounded forth from Christ’s Church in this place. On that day, we gave thanks for the Faith God gave to Betty’s husband, Bud, and for their many years of marriage together, along with among many other things. Those who were here that day heard a divine promise concerning those who have fallen asleep in the Lord, like Bud, and now, Betty: “[they] will rise again from the dead.” It is fitting, in remembrance of God’s grace throughout their faithful years together, that proclamation and this day’s readings are also heard at this funeral service.

Betty’s human remains are now sealed in a casket covered in the white pall this congregation reserves for veiling the mortal remains of those who hold fast to the Faith and die confessing Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of their sins. That white pall is used to remind us who are witnesses to the truth this day that Betty will be, on the Last Day, raised from the dead. Her body will be transformed – even if it has been reduced to ashes – it will be changed in the twinkling of an eye! The perishable which will be soon sown in the soil of Illinois will be raised imperishable. That we declare to be true, as it depends upon our incarnate Lord’s promise:

For this remains the will of the One sending Me: that each one having been given to Me, I will not destroy from [eternity], but I will resurrect him {in} the Last Day.²

Until that great Day, the immortal soul of Saint Betty reclines in the Presence of the Living God. Gone are her health struggles along with any and all pains that came from living more than 90 years in this fallen creation in her mortal body. She has begun to receive the end of the Faith – the everlasting salvation of her soul – which God had begun in her in A.D. 1927 with the

¹ John 6:39

² John 6:39

promise He gave to her with the water and the Word of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

She was kept firm in that promise through God's Word, which she learned to confess with the Church by her 15th year of life. From that time forth, she freely reclined in the Real Presence of Jesus, as she was fed by Him His Body and Blood in, with, and under bread and wine. That too, was enacted on account of a promise Jesus had given around 19 centuries before Betty was confirmed in the Faith. Hear again that which Jesus still says, in the Divine Hope that all who hear His Word will believe and be saved:

My Father gives to all of you the Bread from heaven, the True One; for the Bread of the God remains the One continually coming down from the heaven, and life He continues to give to the cosmos.³

Christians have, for millennia, confessed those words to be true for, and their essence available to, all believers. In unity of confession concerning Christ's sacramental Bodily Presence in the Lord's Supper, God has continued to gather the faithful in fellowship around His Table, in many locations, that they might taste and behold His good gifts. While she was physically able, God moved our sister in Christ to hear His Word and receive His gifts at the tables of Christian congregations faithful to His entire revealed Word. Since 1998, until relatively recently, Betty received Christ from His Altar Table in this place, on Sundays, and for several years, on Wednesdays.

As her health waned, she moved to assisted living and care-centers and was unable to recline here. So, the Church took from this place the Word, bread, and wine. From the hands of her pastors, Betty received the Bread from heaven in hospitals, at Fairwinds, Copper Health, and, at the last, at Amber Lights. God, who promised to continually come down from the heavens to be with His own, came to her in the Means of Grace in rooms which were reserved for her bodily care. Through His Word and Sacraments, He forgave her sins. In His Person veiled under bits of bread and sips of wine, Jesus strengthened her for passing from any and all struggles in this life into eternal bliss. In Holy Absolution, she was strengthened in the Faith as she heard afresh each time, "I forgive you all your sins," declared in the Name of the Triune God. In His Word, read into her ears by caring friends, members of the congregation, those training for service to God's people in the Church, God kept her firmly in His Word. All of that is proclaimed today so that you would know that, at this very instant, on account of all He did for her in this life, God holds her in His abiding Presence.

Throughout her life, God moved Saint Betty to confess her faith concerning His promises. She confessed Him as Savior in like manner as those did who

³ John 6:32b-33.

would have been found faithful in the era when Jesus visibly, physically walked among sinners, calling them to repentance, and, in the end, shedding His blood to wash away the stain of sin from them. Some of those who were recorded to offer to Jesus these words would eventually be numbered with the multitudes of the faithful:

Then they said to Him, "Lord, always You must give to us this Bread!"⁴

To those who believed that Jesus came to give them that living Bread from Heaven, Jesus gave, and gives, blessed eternal life. To those who continued to beg for the Bread from heaven, and to the faithful ever since among whose number we may now count Betty Ahrens, Jesus continues to say:

I, I AM the Bread of Life; the one continually coming to Me will definitely not be hungry, and the one continually believing in Me will definitely not ever thirst.⁵

Jesus has fulfilled those words for our sainted sister in the Lord. He did so for the sake of His Faith. He came to her through His Word. With the Father, He sent the Holy Spirit upon her. That Life-Giver worked in her all the days of her life. He, working through the Word she heard so regularly, kept Betty in the good confession of the Faith. In that Spirit, she abides in the Presence of God. That was all God's work. This the Holy Spirit through St. Paul declares. You heard him say that the eternal Father has blessed all who continue to believe in His Word, with *every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ,*

just as He chose us in Him before the casting down of the [foundation of the] cosmos, for us to be holy and blameless in His Presence in sacrificial love, having predestined us for adoption on account of Jesus Christ into Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.⁶

On account of God's faithfulness to His promises such as that, anyone who is called by His Name – that is you who have been adopted by God through His Word visible and proclaimed – all who bear God's Name are declared, in Christ, to be holy and blameless. It is not on account of any of Saint Betty's acts of love, of mercy, of charity, that she abides even now in the Lord's Presence as she awaits the resurrection of her body. All the good she ever thought, spoke, did or displayed was the result of God working through her. All that was ever apart from that good is gone from her now, and forever!

⁴ John 6:34.

⁵ John 6:35.

⁶ Ephesians 1:3-5.

This day, in this place, you are called to hear God's will for all humans. It continues to be publicly proclaimed here that you may have blessed everlasting life, with Betty and Bud and all who have fallen asleep in the Faith of Jesus. When asked what work anyone might do work to receive the food which endures to eternal life, Jesus says:

"This remains the work of the God, that you all may continue to believe into the One Whom He sent."⁷

That is why this service this day is truly about God, and His work, in and for the faithful, such as Betty. She knew, and others knew, that she believed in the One Whom He sent because she spoke of Him! Out of God's faithfulness to her, our sister-in-the-faith discovered close family in the Church. He drew her to this place, long before she knew the friends, some also now fully with the Lord, and others still present here today.

God has used the occasion of her death in Christ to draw you here to witness heaven meet earth in the proclaimed Word of God, and the Visible Word of the Sacrament of the Altar. God's Church reminds you that those who recline on this side of the Table Rails, confessing Christ's Presence in the Supper elements, are joined by those, such as our sainted sister, who confessing Christ purely in eternity recline on the other side of the Table. We commune here confessing our sins and recognizing our Savior in His chosen means. They feast there, no longer as sinners, for the Lord has removed the body of sin from them, but as saints who feast in His fully revealed glorious Presence. We kneel in humility before His veiled Presence. In this place, at that Table, the Church Triumphant and the Church Militant join around the One Whom God the Father sent, receiving His gifts in kind. We are free to behold in the eternally faithful joined around the Lord's Table with those who would be found faithful until their last days, the will of the Father revealed, as Jesus still says:

"All the ones seeing the Son and believing in Him may have life eternal, and I will resurrect him, I [alone in] the Last Day."⁸

The Word of God declares clearly *that the power to make the dead alive and to execute judgement has been given to Christ (BoC 602.58)*. The good work and true worship of the Good News of God is therefore, to receive good things from Him (c.f. BoC 155.310). Throughout her mortal years, by God's grace, Betty was found faithful in that. Now, in immortal eternity, she endures in His good things as she awaits the resurrection of her restored flesh, on the Day when Jesus will

⁷ John 6:29b.

⁸ John 6:49b.

complete His promises to all the faithful for all time. He has *not destroy(ed them) from all eternity, but (He) will resurrect (them) in the Last Day!*

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

Trinity XI, Saturday

Funeral Service for Elizabeth "Betty" (Wagner) Ahrens

Isaiah 40:28-31; Ephesians 1:3-12; John 6:26-40

September 2, 2017

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

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Soli Deo Gloria