



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Fr. Timothy Horner
Sue Naunheim funeral
27 Dec 08

When someone we love dies, it leaves us with very mixed feelings:
---Our faith tells us that in the next life the joys of heaven and even of purgatory are beyond our imagining, and so we rejoice for Sue; and yet at the same time we grieve the loss to ourselves.
---We believe, we hope, and we pray that Sue is now eternally happy, yet only God knows this; that may leave just a small shadow of worry in our minds
---the gospels tell us both of God's love and of his justice. Matthew 25, that famous chapter, which includes the Lord's only description of the Last Judgment, has the sheep going off to bliss and the goats going off to punishment. We cannot avoid having some anxiety about this both for others and for ourselves. .

Look at it another way. For the French existentialist Albert Camus, the ultimate serious question was whether to stay alive or to end life. For us, the ultimate serious question is, shall we end in heaven or not?

No memorial Mass, no funeral Mass can resolve those tensions nor answer those questions for us, but they can provide the material with which we can resolve and answer them. We can and must pray both for Sue and for ourselves that the answer about heaven is YES. But only in the light of the Paschal mystery, which is what the Mass is about, can we pray that Sue and, in due course, we too will share in the victory over sin and death that Jesus won by his own Passion, death and resurrection.

We believe that our next life will be the fulfilment of the promise made us at Baptism of a share in the divine life, because we shall see God as he is and become like him. Those are words from the first Letter of Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist, whose Feast is today.

The priest says at every Mass as he prepares the gifts, "*May we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity*" That is the *admirabile commercium*, the wonderful trade, or bargain, of which the Christmas liturgies make so much. We, as it were, give Jesus a share in our humanity and he in return gives us a share in his divinity.



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We can even take that beautiful phrase from the Song of Songs “*Come my love, my lovely one, come*” and imagine, as others have done, that it is the Lord’s greeting to the soul at their first meeting in the afterlife. This would be so much in line with God’s love for us, which was so large a part of Jesus’ message to us, especially in the writings of Saint John, “whom Jesus loved”.

The readings chosen for this Mass support what I have been saying.

First reading: Those who trust in [the Lord] shall understand truth
and the faithful shall abide with him in love
(Knowing God and loving God are the joys of heaven)

Second reading: Whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s
(at all times, we are the Lord’s men and women; at all times
he is our Lord; at all times he loves us)

Gospel: I will not reject anyone who comes to me (i.e. comes and believes); Everyone who sees the Son (i.e. acknowledges that he is Son of God & sent by the Father) [will] have eternal life.

We can learn from these readings; we can learn also from Sue. She was one of our Confraters, linked by prayer and friendship with the Abbey. She had a radiance that was with her even when I saw her a few days before her death. But we can learn most notably from her marriage of 59 years (the anniversary would have been yesterday), and from her relationship to her family. These were the center of her life. Sue and Bo were an inseparable couple, and this was reflected in the family: there was an annual family reunion out west. The twenty-second is coming up, and they still want to be there! She did not interfere with her children: she asked them no more than one real question a day, and expected a real answer, she did not bug them. That reminds me of a great headmaster of Ampleforth, our school in England, who loved the phrase ‘ordered liberty’, meaning in the context of the school, more order for the younger boys and more liberty for the older.

Let me conclude with a most consoling vision of what comes immediately after death. It comes from Saint Catherine of Genoa’s *Treatise on Purgatory* written probably a little before 1500. I recommend it to you: it takes perhaps fifteen minutes to read. She was a mystic and visionary, and the Church is very cautious about visionaries. We do not have to believe what they write, but nor do we have not to believe it. We may choose. Immediately after death, she writes, we shall, for a moment, see ourselves as we really are,



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virtues, vices and all. But then we shall see the Lord face to face and be so overwhelmed by his goodness, beauty, and total attractiveness that we can do nothing except respond with all our love. Whatever he says to us: 'come, enter the kingdom prepared for you', or 'wait a while in Purgatory', we shall, in love, accept with joy. There are, she writes, no joys comparable to those of the souls in purgatory except the joys of those in paradise.

There is a little sting in the tail: she does not say there will be no pain in purgatory, but that if there is, we shall accept that too with joy because of the greatness of our love.

So when we pray for Sue, we could pray that the Lord's greeting to her, and to us in our time, might be something like, 'Come, my love, my lovely one come'.