

With Thanksgiving for the Life of
Betty Ann Stucki
November 27, 1934 + August 6, 2021 Psalms 23 &
36:5-10; Philippians 4:4-9; John 15:9-13



Let us pray.

*Joyful, joyful we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of love!
Hearts unfold like flow'rs before thee,
praising thee, their sun above. Melt the clouds of sin and sadness,
drive the gloom of doubt away. Giver of immortal gladness,
fill us with the light of day. Amen*

Those words go with the familiar tune of Beethoven's Ode or Hymn to Joy. That expansive joy seemed like a good, if unusual, starting place in reflecting on Betty. Our Bible readings were also filled with joy.

It might seem out of place as we gather for a funeral, but I couldn't help but start there because of feeling such joy from and with Betty, and with such simple reasons. I had to do no more than walk through her door at St. Mary's Care Center and she would gush about how good it was to see me and that she'd been praying about me.

I'm pretty sure it wasn't anything about me personally. I suspect she felt that joy at seeing others of you arrive for visits, too. I got to see it also when a caroling group would make a special stop at her room. And I know she felt it even with those who didn't visit; she was regularly

expressing deep gratitude for the connections at church—eager to keep up on the “gossip” as she called it, and to extend greetings back to friends she knew and even to those she didn't know, simply for being part of caring community together. Always such joy!

She certainly held it about family, about children and grandchildren as she'd share updates or even just enthusiasm. She sure loved you—and had a lot of family to get to love!—and, in the words of Jesus, she laid down her life for you in love. I'm told it was part of her joy of cooking and baking, especially for the grandkids to have a “Happy Plate” when they were done. It's the kind of joy of playing “hide the button” with her own children, of flying in her husband's plane, of trips later in life always to enjoy the Mississippi River. Heck, she even found joy and pride in her work, as she'd tell me about relationships and commitment to the Department of Transportation, still recounting all it meant long years after she retired. That's a lot of joy in life.

I would hear occasionally of the card group. There was joy for bingo at the care center. But outside the normal realm of fun, Betty even enjoyed going to the Catholic church services (after she convinced herself it was okay for a lifelong Lutheran to be there).

It still makes me think of her place perched beside the doors at church with her card friend Jean Oliverson, the two of them serving as the standard greeting committee. That's a hard part that as some people return to church after this last year, there are these vacancies, like of Betty and Jean gone, no longer there as people come and go, not only missing their joy and delight, but having that obviously affect the rest of us, too.

Maybe that begins to mix some of the joy with a dose of lament or sadness.

And that also fits Betty. For all of her gladness, she wasn't simply that everything was Pollyanna perfection. Sometimes the food wasn't that great. Sometimes she worried about how her hair looked. Sometimes she missed friends. Sometimes she wasn't feeling well or was frustrated at her immobility.

In these last several years, a repeated refrain was Betty saying to me, “I don’t know why this happened. I don’t know why God would do this to me.” She reflected on a long life of feeling healthy, and she sure didn’t like not feeling that way, not able to be up for the many activities she enjoyed.

I don’t know what to do with her question. I wouldn’t say God was doing it to her, that when we feel bad or have problems it’s because God inflicts them on us. Neither do we simply need to be resigned to unfortunate facts of life that things get harder and feel less good as a person ages. And I sure wouldn’t tell Betty just to look on the bright side, to focus instead on all of the good things she’d had in life, to enjoy the memories, and pay attention to what was still bringing her joy.

I didn’t need to try to say that; clearly, she knew it. She had joy and a beaming smile, even if there was also pain and tears and longing for some things to be different. Betty knew somehow that she could embrace the good of life, but didn’t need to just accept the bad. Our prayers, may often give thanks, but they can also be a protest and a lament.

Especially in a time like today, we lament death, and we protest against death. And God not only hears us, but God enters it with us; with the best protest against death, God goes into it by dying, as Jesus laid down his life in love for you, his death on the cross in order to rise from the grave and bring you also with Betty to new life. So today, although we grieve and mourn in the face of death and what is not right, we also are met by the promise of resurrection with Betty. Even today, our word can be “rejoice—again I will say rejoice.”

Let us pray, once more with words of love and an ode to joy:

Thou art giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever blest, wellspring of the joy of living, ocean-depth of happy rest. Thou our Father, Christ our brother, all who live in love are thine; teach us how to love each other, lift us to the joy divine. Amen