

Reflection for Mass of Resurrection for Sister Rita Bracht

Welcome to this resurrection celebration for Sister Rita Bracht; a special welcome to Rita's family. The presence of so many of you here today gives testimony to the person that she was.

How is it that these Scriptures can relate?

- "I will proclaim your name to my sisters and brothers.
In the midst of the congregation I will **SING** your praise."
- For to me life is Christ, and death is gain.
... I long to depart this life and be with Christ
- Jesus said to the disciples, "do not worry Do not be afraid any longer... for God is pleased to give you the kingdom."

These Scripture texts from today's readings could well summarize the life of Sister Rita Bracht.

- **In the midst of the congregation I will SING Your praise."**

Rita knew well how to pray with art and music and dance. She sketched her prayer. She danced into heaven in her ruby slippers.

And why not sing prayer? Through the ages singing has been an important way to praise God and to be united with God.

Consider the exhortations in the psalms, for example:

- ❖ Oh come, let us **sing** to the Lord; ...let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
Psalm 95:1-2
- ❖ I will **sing** to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.
Psalm 13:6
- ❖ I will **sing** to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
Psalm 104:33
- ❖ I will **sing** a new song to you, O God;
Psalm 144:9
- ❖ **Sing** to the Lord a new song of praise in the assembly of the godly!
Psalm 149:1
- ❖ Oh **sing** to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth!
Psalm 96:1

❖ I will **sing** praises to You among the nations.

Psalms 57:8-9

There are countless more exhortations to sing in the psalms.

Hildegard of Bingen, a German Benedictine nun, scientist, mathematician and musician, wrote a letter in the late 1170's to the prelates in Mainz who had forbidden her and her followers from singing her music. She defended this singing as the coming to life of God's words, that singing praise establishes direct contact with the heavenly liturgy sung by the angels.

She believed: The soul is in resonance with the harmonies of the spheres, thus transcending the individual into an image of the all-encompassing world soul.

For Hildegard, music is a gift handed from God to humans. The task of music is to lead to a reunification with God.

There is an ancient saying that was part of our earliest teaching in religious life: who sings well prays twice.

Rita's singing/praying, and leading the community in prayer was inspirational. A comment recently made to me was: "Her beautiful voice in the chapel as cantor will be remembered by many who had the joy of hearing it. Rita had such a clear and inspiring kind of tone...."

She had not been able to serve as cantor for the past several months...our loss.

Several years ago, at a talent show that was part of our annual Assembly, Rita sang this song, right here in the chapel:

"On a clear day rise and look around you, and you'll see who you are. On a clear day, how it will astound you, that the glow of your being outshines every star. On a clear day...you can see forever..."

Not the usual prayer-words, but prayer nevertheless.

➤ **For to me life is Christ, and death is gain.**

... I long to depart this life and be with Christ

2 days before Rita died, she told me she wasn't going to come out of it this time...it was worse than the last time. I could see her struggling for breath. She told her nephew that she wished she were like her mother. He said later that she had as much courage, facing death that her mother had.

Rita died on the funeral day of Sister Roberta Grzelak, who also welcomed death calmly and with resignation. Perhaps Roberta also helped Rita in this regard.

This Gospel from Luke is the Divine Providence Gospel.

- **Jesus said to the disciples, “do not worry. Do not be afraid any longer... for God is pleased to give you the kingdom.**

Rita certainly exemplified Divine Providence. She served as educator in Divine Providence schools, in at least 15 different settings in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, and 2 in the Archdiocese of Detroit. Her first assignment in McKees Rocks, was where she taught me. I remember music class, and loved to hear her sing, and to learn singing from her. On a later assignment, at St. Isaac Jogues in St. Clair Shores, MI, she taught our Sister Pat Eeckhout. Pat says that she used to hang around school in August to help Rita prepare her classroom; she also remembers that Rita was a very good teacher

In the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Rita taught in our schools in the west, east, south and north of Allegheny County and also in Beaver County. While many of her assignments were repeats, at least 5 were for 1 year only. That had to be very difficult...to get settled in and then be needed elsewhere. What a commitment to Divine Providence: to pull up roots and go where called to continue to make the Providence of God visible to all.

Even when she was no longer teaching in the classroom, Rita supported education in the background by doing office work and by serving as school librarian, for which she had also been educationally prepared. Continuing to make God's Providence visible.

What can we say of this woman who continually praised God, who faced death with courage, who made the Providence of God visible to the world?

Because singing praise establishes direct contact with the heavenly liturgy sung by the angels, perhaps we could say, using the words that Rita herself put to music:

My soul proclaims your greatness, O my God, my spirit finds joy in God my Savior, for you who are mighty have done great things for me.

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