

Helen Olive Funeral Homily
Pastor Arthur Murray
December 16, 2020

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was^[a] in Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,

⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

John 13: 34-38

³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

³⁶ Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered, “Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward.”

This is the gospel of the Lord; Praise to you, O Christ.

Olive, Helen Deloris (Moen)

Age 88 of Bloomington, passed away December 12, 2020. Preceded in death by beloved husband of 60 years, Thomas M. Olive; parents, Harry and Ruth Moen; sister, Edith. Survived by sons, Thomas H., William and James; daughter, Karen; daughters-in-law Martha and Jeanette; grandchildren, Stephanie, Michael, Ruth, Vanessa, Suzanne, Elsie, Nathan, Ethan and Henry; grandsons-in-law, Ehghay and Kierian; great-grandchildren, Lucy, Zeke and Dahlia; step-grandsons, Andrew, John, Joe, Marcus and Matthew. Helen graduated from South High School, class of 1950 and attended the Minnesota School of Business and the University of Minnesota. She then worked at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis and the Hennepin County Department of Court Services as an administrative assistant. She was a stay-at-home mom for 20 years, during which time she did volunteer work for Transfiguration Lutheran Church, drove for Meals on Wheels, and taught Sunday school. She also was a Cub Scout den mother, Boy Scout merit badge counselor, a room mother, and she volunteered in the school lunch room. She then went back to work at Normandale Community College. Reading was her main hobby, then bridge and photography. She traveled extensively with her husband Tom visiting 41 countries and 44 states. Public Celebration of Life service to be held on Aug. 7, 2021.

I would like to read a poem that Helen wrote many years ago:

Poem.

Blessed be the life and memory of Helen Deloris Olive.

Helen had the heart of a servant. Whether she was serving professionally, or as a volunteer, whether she was looking after the family or looking after young acolytes at church, she dedicated herself, her whole self to the well-being of others.

[Even as she neared the last days of her life, she was thinking of others, determined that the grand-kids and great-grandkids would still get their Christmas presents from her... which they will!]

This dedication to the well-being of others, this deep valuing of those who had been placed in her life, sprung directly from her faith.

There was no question in her son Jim's mind, which Scripture should be read today. The famous "Christ hymn" from Philippians chapter 2. One of the earliest known passages of Scripture. A passage in which scholars believe St. Paul (the author) was quoting the lyrics of a song that was being sung in the earliest home church gatherings that formed the core of the first Christian community.

Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,
... emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave...

Since the earliest days of the church, one of the highest expressions of the Christian faith has been to embrace this form of humble devotion. Becoming a servant (another possible translation in addition to slave) to Christ and to one another. Helen embraced this servanthood whole-heartedly and it permeated every aspect of how she lived.

She served and she served well. In part, it was because of her love for others that the last years of her life were so difficult. She wanted to be there for others, but the pain in her body and the additional pain from the social isolation of the pandemic made serving, the thing that brought her the most joy and life, close to impossible. This was the cross that she bore.

But, thanks be to God, Helen is now free from her pain, and has gone on to receive her reward. And oh, what a reward it is!

In our reading today from the gospel of John, Simon Peter, one of Jesus' most dedicated friends and servants, where he will be going. Jesus gives one of his typical round about non-answers, but there is also a clear promise: "you will follow me when your time comes."

This is the promise, yes, we will all, all of us, follow Jesus to the cross. We will all have our suffering to bear. And yes, we will all receive the reward that follows. We will be lifted up and exalted. We will inherit the glory of the Father. We will share in the eternal dance of joy that exists between the Creator, the Redeemer and the Spirit of Life. We cannot even begin to imagine how glorious it will be. And this is what our faith tells us that Helen is experiencing, even as we speak.

It can sometimes be challenging for someone to go from humble servant, to exalted being. Every fiber in our Lutheran soaked psyches can often reject the idea that anyone should make a fuss over us. Helen embodied this skepticism of any special treatment that might be directed at her. After all, fairness and equality were guiding principles for her in everything she did.

For many years she struggled with hearing loss. There is a story of someone suggesting that she pray for healing and ask God for help with this particular struggle. She dismissed the idea “No, I don’t deserve that!”

After all, with all the struggles in the world, why should she be immune. She embraced the struggle as part of her cross to bear.

But is now time for you, Helen, to lay that cross down. It is time for you to enter into the glory of your Maker.

After raising the kids, Helen continued to serve and went back to work at Normandale College. Doing humble work, caring for others, making sure things went well. She flew under the radar and didn’t want or need anyone to make a fuss over her.

One day someone came, out of the blue, and gave her a rose. A single beautiful, glorious rose. This made a deep impact on Helen. For years afterwards she talked about that rose, and how wonderful the person was who gave it to her.

I have to imagine that the most beautiful parts of life here on earth must be echoes of heaven. There must be music in heaven. There must be roses in heaven. We know there is love in heaven. So Helen, receive your bouquet of roses. Don’t worry, it is equal. Everyone receives them in heaven. For as you said in your poem, quoting Psalm 23, that you wrote so many years ago:

Your cup is now overflowing, and always will be. Sip, drink, of God’s goodness and know that you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.