

Celebration of Life for Virginia Joyann “Jody” Smith
Sunday, September 4, 2022 3:00 pm

Homily The Rev. David McCoy

Today’s scripture readings can tell us a good bit about Jody Smith by applying what we have heard to the life of this very faithful servant of the Lord. Faithful—that is one of the most descriptive words for her. Many Sundays Jody would be the first person in the pews. The worship of the Lord was her most important activity on the Lord’s day.

Yes, even more important than the animals she so dearly loved and tended. More important than the hundreds of books she gathered and placed on the shelves in her home—books that she knew held wisdom and intellectual challenge to anyone who picked them up and started to read the pages. The worship of the Lord was one of the activities Jody treasured most in her life; she was the Lord’s servant.

Church—especially Sunday worship—was very special for her. It was first and foremost a time to give thanks to her Lord. She loved the liturgy and was especially fond of the music that was always an integral part of the worship experience. It was also a time to know that she was part of a community of like-minded folks, also worshipers of the Lord. She loved that sense of community, a sense that was carried over for her as the congregation would often gather in what we call by the grandiose name of “coffee hour”, a time to visit and share friendship with fellow worshippers of the Lord.

She was a devout and humble worshiper of the Lord. She was also so respectful of those persons ordained to provide God’s sacraments, that in years past, during the part of the service we call the Prayers of the People, Jody would always kneel in reverent humility. She did—that is—until a day Bishop Breidenthal visited Good Shepherd. As he began to lead the congregation in the Prayers of the People, he said, “These are called the Prayers of the *People*, and that means that we all stand and proclaim them as *our* prayers.” From that day onward, Jody was standing upright to proclaim the Prayers of the People—*her* prayers being proclaimed aloud by the Celebrant.

Our scripture readings for today remind us of this devoted Christian. Gentle in demeanor, gentle in manner of dress, gentle in life's daily chores—but a fierce defender of the faith, a strong challenger of the inequities of life, a committed lover of humankind and all the animals that inhabited her domain. The reading of St. John's Gospel about the Good Shepherd says it about Jody, as the British say, "spot on". She was a dedicated shepherd of the animals at her farm and a dedicated shepherd of the Christian faith she had observed for so many years. She was a fine example for us all.

Jody knew her scripture and she knew her Lord—and when she saw things happening in God's world that she believed needed to be challenged and/or improved—she would let others know. She would write letters to the local newspapers and sometimes she would address public officials directly about her concerns.

The reading from the Book of Wisdom we heard tells us some more about the kind of person whom we are remembering:

"Those who trust in God will understand truth,
and the faithful will abide in him with love,
because grace and mercy are upon his holy name,
and he watches over his elect."

"Those who trust in God": that was Jody. She never doubted the presence and grace of God's love—even in her darkest hours: when loved ones died, were injured, or had personal setbacks. She relied on God's grace to give her strength and sustain her—and we can learn much from the faith she showed in such time: as the scripture says, "grace and mercy are upon his holy ones, and he watches over his elect."

We can add to those affirmations the verse we heard from the Revelation to John: "Then one of the elders asked me, 'Those in white robes, who are they, and where did they come from?'"

The question is answered: "they are before the throne of God", and "the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water.'"

We can be sure that Jody is in the presence of those “springs of living water”, as during her life she persevered and continued without ceasing to love her Lord. Even though there were moments when that love of the Lord was strongly tested, Jody held firm—shaken, maybe, but not bowed or broken. She continued steadfast in the love of the Lord.

Yes, she continued in that way, knowing that, as it is written in today’s Gospel reading, she is one of the Lord’s sheep—faithful to the master: the one who was and is shepherd of all: “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and they know me.”

Indeed, we can well remember Jody for love of “the flock”—a woman who loved her animals and knew them as creatures of God. Just as St. Francis is known as the patron saint of animals and the environment, so, too, Jody Smith is our contemporary patron saint—one who knew that the environment of the earth and its creatures are all part of God’s sanctified, holy creation.

We can say that Jody was one of God’s sheep—not docile, but faithful--and a follower of his holy blessing—part of “one flock and one shepherd.”

Jody Smith’s life is one worth emulating:

- Strong trust in God—as we heard in the Wisdom reading
- Steadfast faith in the Lord—as we heard in the reading from St. John
- Willing follower of the great shepherd: an image coming to us again in the Revelation to John.

Jody, a shepherd of her own flock, emulating the good shepherd of the Gospel, someone who lived out the life described in the place where she worshipped—the Church of the Good Shepherd. Indeed, this very room was a fitting place of worship for that person to attend—a church for a good shepherd of her own sheep.

Thanks be to God for the life of Jody Smith—and thanks be to God that her life has been given to Him and to us, a life we have gathered here to commemorate and to celebrate—

Thanks be to God for the life of Virginia Joyann “Jody” Smith!