

Funeral sermon for Phyllis Castle

Only recently I read one writer's account of the last moments of the actor Charlie Chaplin's life. Though small of stature, He was a giant figure in the early days of the motion picture industry in Hollywood. His influence on young actors and filmmakers was extraordinary.

While a priest was reading him his last rites, he recited the words, "May God have mercy on your soul". "Why not?" was the legendary actor's reply. "After all, it belongs to Him!"

Our soul does indeed belong to God who created it. God is most inclined to have mercy on something of His own making.

In a prayer addressed to His Heavenly Father on the eve of His death, Jesus offers words of gratitude. He speaks of His disciples as the Father's gift to Himself. "They, whom you gave Me" is a beautiful description of the Christian as such. They have been chosen, set apart, to follow His Son.

Saint Paul echoes this revelation in two of his letters. In his first letter to the Church at Corinth, he wrote, "You belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God", and, in another letter, he said, "For if we live, we live for the Lord or if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

Regrettably, I must confess that, upon learning of the death of Phyllis, I had no recollection of her, even though I buried her husband a couple of years ago. How embarrassing! Thank heavens that God, unlike the pastor of Sacred Heart Church, does not suffer from forgetfulness or dementia. Jesus knows us by name and does not forget us. Ever! As the Good Shepherd, "He calls His sheep by name and leads them out" (Jn. 10:3).

While in the Holy Land several years ago, the then reigning Pontiff, Pope Benedict XVI visited the Yad Vashem Memorial, a sacred place dedicated to the memory of the Jews killed in the horrific tragedy of the Holocaust. He spoke of God's unfailing memory. In his prepared remarks, he reflected on the Jews who had lost their lives.

"They lost their lives but never lost their names--- they are indelibly etched in the hearts of their loved ones, their surviving fellow prisoners, and all those determined never to allow such an atrocity to disgrace mankind again. Most of all, their names are forever fixed in the memory of Almighty God".

I suspect that until the day of her death, Phyllis remembered her beloved husband Ron and hoped to meet him once again in Heaven, our eternal destiny.

Death cannot rob us of all the beautiful memories we treasure in our hearts. Phyllis was a loving wife, faithful parishioner, and a true friend to all of you gathered here for her funeral mass

She belongs to Christ.

Let us pray that once we cross the shores of death we may be reunited with her in paradise.