

Funeral homily for Jeanine Grinage

Several years ago, a popular recording artist, Whitney Houston, was featured in the film, “the Preacher’s Wife”. Whitney, who began her singing in the junior choir of New Hope Baptist Church in Newark New Jersey, sings many songs in the movie. Perhaps the most memorable of them is “Joy”. The vocative lyrics speak eloquently of the impact of faith on an individual’s soul.

“Joy in my soul

Joy, joy down in my soul Sweet beautiful soul, saving joy

Oh, joy, joy, joy in my soul”

Joy is the unmistakable sign of the presence of the Lord.

In the scriptural accounts of Our Lord’s resurrection we hear of joy.

In John’s gospel, for instance, we read “The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord”.

In Luke’s gospel, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary “went away quickly from the tomb.

Fearful, yet overjoyed, ran to announce this (the Resurrection) to His disciples”.

Jeanine was a woman of joy and sweetness. For many years, she sang in our choir. Her choir director told me “She was blessed with a beautiful voice.”

“He who sings”, said Saint Augustine, “prays twice”. Sung prayer expresses the joy of the heart and the happiness of the one who has encountered Christ and experienced his love.

Let me share with you a story of another choir member of our church, Ken Mangione, who a few years ago, died of a malignant brain tumor. He and Janine joined their voices in praise of God. One afternoon I visited him at Albany medical Center, where he was a patient. I was aware of his poor prognosis as I was about to enter his room. Unexpectedly, I heard the voice of one singing a Christian hymn to his bedside nurse. It was the voice of Ken. I was momentarily stunned. I thought, “Does he not know he is close to the hour of his death?”

Saint Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish Franciscan priest, who lost his life in the notorious concentration camp at Auschwitz, was reported to have ended his life in a starvation bunker, where he could be heard singing Polish hymns, no doubt to raise the spirits of his fellow prisoners.

One who sings the praises of God can never be defeated. His faith prevails over every obstacle facing him in life. He knows in his heart that death does not have the last word. He believes in life everlasting. He joyously awaits the life of the world to come.

I have little doubt that Janine now sings in the company of the angels and saints. Yes, a different choir, but the same Lord and savior of us all.