



Thoughts on the Journey...

Suanne Gettings - Pastoral Associate - August 4, 2019

It's amazing how much a house can accumulate over the years: cupboards that are filled with dishes that now get very little use; rooms with furniture that is no longer needed; lawn and garden tools and outdoor furniture, that at one time got plenty of use; gifted trinkets displayed on shelves and table tops; drawers and boxes filled with photos, films, and memorabilia capturing snippets of a family's history, and the list goes on and on. This was the house where Jackie herself grew up as a child and the very home where she and her husband, Roy, raised their nine children. It was a large house that was home to many memories of a family in various stages of life and all the things they collected over the years.

After her husband died, Jackie decided the large house was too much to handle and she made her move to a retirement community. This first move required all hands on deck from her adult children as they helped her separate *what stays* from *what goes*. During the weeks of sorting, the decisions were difficult because nearly every item had a memory attached. That was the first of four moves. Each respective move going forward, required letting go of more possessions because, as Jackie's health declined, so did her living space.

Through all the moves, there were five things that Jackie would not surrender: a picture of the Sacred Heart, a statue of the Blessed Mother, a large photo of her family, her rosary that she prayed daily, and her prayer list which was compiled on used envelopes that were kept together with a rubber band. (she prayed for those people every day)

Then came July 14, 2019. Jackie's declining health finally took its toll on her body. When I walked into her room on that Sunday afternoon, she was peacefully curled in her bed, looking more frail than the week before, and barely breathing.

Her room was filled with family gathered around her sharing memories, sharing the bittersweet tension of knowing what was coming, praying together, and wishing her well as she prepared for her journey home. We watched her labored respirations for several hours secretly wanting more to come but also wanting them to end so she would be at peace. At about 9:20 p.m., there it was – her final breath on this earth. It left her as though it had wings that would carry her to the God she loved so deeply.

In this week's Gospel from Luke, Jesus was speaking to a crowd of people. A man addressed him and asked that he tell his brother to share his inheritance with him.

Jesus then made it clear to the people that they should guard against greed because one's life does not consist of one's possessions. He then told a parable about a rich man who had such a bountiful harvest that he was planning to build more barns to store his wealth. Then God addressed the rich man saying:

'You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?' Thus will it be for all who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God.'

Whether it be possessions or people, there are moments in all of our lives when we have no choice but to *let go*. In those final moments when you're keeping vigil with someone you love deeply, you don't do an accounting of what they have, but rather what they have given - the impact they have had on your life.

My mother, Jackie, understood Jesus' message in Luke's Gospel. Her life was not about collecting things, but about surrendering to God body, mind, and spirit. She continually thought of ways to give of herself to others, whether they be her family or complete strangers. She knew how to love unconditionally and to forgive freely, even when the people she loved hurt her most; Jackie always put others before herself; she was the first to serve and the last to be served; her trust in God was her most powerful weapon against despair or defeat in the face of the trials in her life - and she had many.

While looking around her room the night she was dying, her possessions consisted of a chair, a dresser, a bed, and a lamp. But that's not an indication of her stored wealth for around her were the souls she nurtured in love, the souls transformed by her living example of faith, the souls touched by the seeds of God's love which she planted in their hearts. Jackie left this world a rich woman in the things that mattered to God and Jackie left behind a better world because she understood the relevance of faith.

MY HEARTFELT GRATITUDE TO THE COUNTLESS NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN OUR PARISH FOR THEIR COMPASSION, PRAYERS, CARDS, HUGS, AND WORDS OF CONDOLENCE RELATED TO THE DEATH OF MY MOTHER. IT IS YOUR LOVE AND KINDNESS THAT HAS HELD ME UP IN MY GRIEF AND I GIVE THANKS FOR ALL OF YOU !