

All of you who know Margaret's origins can understand why the family chose the reading from the book of Ruth for today's celebration of her life. Like Ruth she left her family, home and country when she married Bob, a U.S. Navy man on duty in Turkey. Where he was ordered to go, she went. When Bob finished his tours and returned permanently to the USA, she came with him, eventually becoming a citizen.

The Psalmist wrote somewhere "Life is over like a sigh; our span is seventy years, or eighty for those who are strong." Margaret was a little more than a month away of that eighty, but we all know she was a strong one. She was strong in her Catholic faith, strong in her love of family and friends, and in ministering in the Naval church communities wherever Bob's stationings took her with him.

For some life can be a pilgrimage walk to a sacred shrine, fraught with hazards, crowned with blessings. For others life can be like a sea voyage. It has its stormy times as well as its peaceful ones, cruising and floating on the gentle waves. Those who have faith in a loving God, creator of all that is, sail through the storms of life strengthened in their trust in God's providence and protection. We heard Jesus say in the gospel, "No one who comes to me will I ever reject.... It is the will of the one who sent me that I should lose nothing of what he has given me; rather, that I should raise it up on the last day.... Everyone who looks upon the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life."

Margaret was baptized into Christ by Msgr. Roncalli (now Pope St. John XXIII) in Istanbul, and grew up to become a devoted wife, loving mother, and faithful friend. In her last hours she was commended to God's mercy by the sacrament of the anointing of the sick and dying. So we have every good reason to believe that Margaret will have a share in that promised eternal life. She will be united with her parents, friends, all the saints and angels in praising God and marveling at the wonders of his saving grace in her life.

It should be the goal of every one of us to strive for that union with the will of God that can bring us a modicum of happiness in this life, and a bounty of blessings beyond measure in the next. Our lives are in God's hands every moment, every nanosecond. Our God is kind and merciful, slow to anger and rich in compassion. He knows of what we are made, and takes into account our blindness and ignorance that lead us to sin, breaking the bond of peace won for us by Jesus.

But as St. Paul wrote, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Trial, or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword?... In all this we are more than conquerors because of him who has loved us. For I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor powers, neither height nor depth nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

We do not know, cannot not know what heaven is, what it will be like. Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as entered into the mind of man what God has prepared for those who love him. Jesus invites us to come rest in him after all the burdens, disappointments and sufferings that are part of the human condition along with its joys and happy moments too.

The English spiritual write Evelyn Underhill wrote a poem called Continuous Voyage, believed inspired by her frequent sailing on her uncle's yacht. She turns those experiences into a metaphor for a very dynamic heaven, not a static eternal rest. I will share with you some of the last verses.

*“Adventure is a seaman’s life, the port calls but the weary and the tempest driven.
Perhaps its safety were too dearly bought if that for this our freedom must be given.
For lo! our Steersman is for ever young and with much gladness sails beneath the stars;
Our ship is old, yet still her sails are hung like eager wings upon the steady spars.
Then tell me not of the havens for the soul where tides can never come, nor storms molest;
My sailing spirit seeks no sheltered goal, nought is more sad than safety--
life is best when every day brings danger for delight, and each new solemn night
engulfs our whitening wake within the whole.
Beyond the bent horizon oceans are where every star lies like an isle upon Eternity.
There would I be given to his rushing wind, no prudent course to find for some snug corner of
Infinity; but evermore to sail close-reefed before the gale,
and see the steep great billow of his love with threatening form come roaring home and lift my
counter in its might sweep.*

I like Mrs. Underhill’s description of heaven as a sailing into infinity never seeking another shore. The sails of the soul are filled by the wind of the Spirit while the great billows of God’s love crash over it, only to give it ever greater delight.

Maybe we have a choice. Let us leave it to Margaret whether she just wants a place to rest in God at last after the wearisome limitations of the last years of her life. Or whether her dry bones come alive by the inbreathing of the Holy Spirit and she is ready for every adventure the new life in God offers. We commonly say about someone who has died, May she rest in peace. We could also say about Margaret, May she be fully alive in God forever. Amen