

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

3 Pentecost
June 1, 2008
Fr. Bill McGinty.

“Losing Denny”

The River Ouse flows around the old historic Roman City of York in North Eastern England. It is a very calm and placid river. Because the land is largely flat, the river has a marbled mirrored appearance.

You can imagine how surprised we all were back in the eighties when the river flooded after severe rainstorms. Parts of the old city were damaged.

I mention this because floods and flooding are a prominent part of the readings today. In the first reading Noah copes with a flood sent by God in Genesis and in the Gospel Jesus tells the parable of the ‘house that is built on rock.’

I have always lived by rivers. I was born alongside the River Foyle. I grew up by the rivers Dee and Mersey. For a short period I was acquainted with the River Ouse and the Thames. Yet the longest I have ever been by a river is right here by the Delaware.

Rivers like floods make great metaphors. We can see them as metaphors for our own lives; - from the energized young river of our youth, to the winding meandering river of our old age that empties into the sea.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus is at pains to teach his disciples a valuable lesson. He tells them: “not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the ones who do the will of my Father in heaven. Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came and the winds blew, and beat on that house, but it did not fall.”

Last week I received the news that a great and dear friend of mine had died back in England. Her name was Denny Pitt and she lived by the River Ouse in York with her husband James and her three children.

Denny was perhaps the most religious person I ever knew. Not because she spent a lot of time in church or in prayer, but because she embodied Jesus’ Gospel of love in the way she dealt with other people.

Have you ever met anyone like that? A person who everyone likes, and liked being around? A person who is always smiling, always building people up, always optimistic, with something positive to say to everyone?

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

When we were all students, thirty something years ago, Denny was the person we all turned to when we needed an answer and someone to trust. Denny always had the answer. She cared nothing for things or possessions. She was a doer, who never watched television. She would remind you of the wise wife in the Book of wisdom busy with the business of her house.

She died of ovarian cancer after an amazing fight. She had much to fight for, - married to a great guy and with three talented teenage children. Yet, if you were to ask her friends and family and those who knew her best, what it was that made her so special, they would tell you: “when she talked to you, she gave you so much of her attention, as if you were the most important thing in her world. She made you feel special. She made you feel that you could achieve anything.”

That is a real Gospel quality. It is the living Gospel of which Jesus speaks. Where does it come from? How do you get that? Is it something that you can learn? I think it is a part of the integrity of the Gospel message. ‘The day that we decide to take the words of Jesus and really mean what they say, - is the day we meet with transformation.’ Denny Pitt transformed peoples’ lives, because they wanted to be just like her. Around her they were more positive, more fun loving and more caring. People rarely disappointed her, because she seemed to bring the best out in them. Jesus does that constantly in the Gospel. Consequently, as they grow in faith, wisdom and maturity, the Apostles and disciples become just like him. You can imagine that Denny’s children are just like her, because her faith too was built on rock.

In the center of the old and beautiful City of York, is York Minster one of the greatest, largest and most beautiful churches in the world. It towers above the city where only buildings of two or three stories are allowed. It took 400 years to build, starting in 1100ad. In its lifetime it was a refuge for the people of York against storm, flood and invader. Yet, even that great church does not compare with the rock of faith Denny Pitt was to her family, husband, children and friends. Her early death somehow takes the sting out of death itself; - as if, heaven is a much better proposition with her in it.

Let me finish with a story she told me as we walked around that great cathedral one day. She said that she had visited Durham in order to paint. She was an artist. She had permission to be on top of the church’s tower which was under repair. She was warned that the church closed at 6pm, and all doors would be locked. She forgot, busy as she was with her painting. To her dread she heard the Sexton lock the only door to the exiting staircase. Trapped on top of the tower she decided to climb down the scaffolding on the outside of the tower. She descended level after level, ladder after ladder. She got to twenty feet from the ground only to find that the final ladder had been removed. She spotted a young couple walking across the lawn of the cathedral with the light failing. She waved and shouted frantically till they saw her. They raised the ladder and she got down safely. On thanking them she heard the young guy say:

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

“We are on our honeymoon! What a story we have to tell the folks back home that on the first night of our honeymoon we rescued a damsel, in distress, from a tower.” She loved telling that story.

The Gospel today forces us to each ask ourselves: “where is your rock? Is our faith so strong, that others can see it and are affected by it when they come into contact with us?”

There is a great distance between the River Ouse and the River Delaware. Yet there is a little bit of Denny Pitt in this ministry and in this old church, because we too share the same Gospel values. I carry a little of Denny Pitt because long ago she gave me truth and with it her friendship.

In today’s Eucharist, I promised to remember Denny, her husband James and her children Laurie, Oliver and Sophie and all her family that despite her loss – the light of her Gospel light might continue to shine in their lives. Let us pray for them in this service.

Amen+