

*Memorial Service
September 8, 2009*

Helen Fohls

Welcome to this church of the Good Shepherd and St John the Evangelist, Helen's spiritual home for so many years. I have been asked to refer to her as Nanny, which tells me immediately how close you all were to her and what she meant to you.

As she came Sunday after Sunday to pray and worship here, I used to wonder what she prayed about and who she prayed for.

You see, everyone knew her here as a very holy and spiritual person, one with quiet ways and a radiant smile especially for children. Now I know, she prayed for her family and all who joy and happiness was tied up with all of you. She did a good job.

Last week I was watching a couple caring for their baby in a waiting room. They knew all of its moves as they fussed over it and the baby responded to their touch, care and love. We often forget that this is the loving care that our mother gave to each of us in our early years and for week after week, month after month and year after year. As we come together to celebrate Nanny's life today it is this love that you remember, this love of hers that you cherish and this love of hers that she will be best remembered by.

It is tempting to sit and add up what we as sons, daughters, husband and grandchildren owe her. As we look back on the span of our lives, her love, advice, care and generous are doubtlessly what has helped make you the persons and family you are. And in that word family I included all of you, in laws, wives, husbands, cousins and siblings.

Yet that is not how she saw it. She looked at all of you and thought that she had been blessed. You, her family were her blessing. She tracked your progress, she gauged your happiness. She was thrilled at every success. She comforted you in failure. But mostly of all she had a deep and abiding pride in you.

It is hard to give back to someone, who when you are in their presence makes you feel that in all the world, you her child or grandchildren are the most important thing of all her cares or concerns.

And yet you all know deep in your hearts that you can buy her back and many times over. You can be the person she always wanted you to be. Not becoming the president of the United States, but just being you. Being the good person she loved, being true to yourself and holding yourself in the esteem she had of you. This is where Helen/Nanny found her spiritual strength. Here among this old wood and cobblestone walls. Here where on any bright morning the sun lights up these stain glass windows. This is no crystal cathedral, no Gothic church, this is just a holy place where good people with Gospel values come to speak with their God and be strengthened by the wisdom of his word.

I cannot look at that window of Jesus standing by the door, without thinking of Helen/Nanny kneeling there each Sunday.

There are some people who seem to be channels of grace and she surely was one of them. You have inherited that grace and the Spirit of Christ has touched your life through her and her deep faith.

Nothing could separate Helen/Nanny from the love of God as we are told in the 1st reading. She found that love in you.

So many in recent days have spoken of how serene and at peace she was in her last days. 2 Corinthians tells us that that sort of peace comes from knowing the part God and faith has played in your life.

If she ever had any doubts she only had to look at these wonderful grandchildren to know. Only God could have planned to give me gifts like these. You were her gifts. You were her future; you were what gave her the greatest satisfaction and peace in the end.

Today as we say goodbye at the graveside our faith tells us that it is not goodbye, it is "I will see you later." For in the Gospel Jesus tells Martha that he is Resurrection and all who believe in him will live forever.

Having Helen/Nanny in your life has been a privilege. Believing that you will be re-united with her again is what we Christians call heaven.

May she rest in peace of Christ. May she be with you always. May your love for her make you the person she knew you to be.

Amen+