

St George's Anglican Church Malvern

Sermon for the funeral of Patricia Hagerty 21 January 2017

We gather today as one people, Pat's family and friends, her neighbours and her faith community, and we are mourning her death.

We gather today in shock at the suddenness of her dying and in sorrow that her earthly life, long though it has been, is now ended.

We gather today and the words of St Paul to the Christians in Corinth ring true for us, "If one member suffers in the body of Christ which is the Church, all the members suffer with that member." (I Cor. 12.26)

We gather today to farewell our sister in Christ who first worshipped in this Church as a twelve year old girl. Today we give thanks to God for a ninety year old woman of faith who gave herself to the mission of Christ's Church in so many ways - in being a loving member of her family, in this parish in almost every activity and group, through the work of the Mothers' Union, and in the Melbourne Diocese as a member of Synod and the Archbishop's Council.

It has been a life lived well, and lived to the full until that last hour when Pat collapsed, became unconscious and gave herself to God, as she had done over her lifetime in a myriad of ways, just a few hours later.

We've been saying to one another we think it is just as she would have wanted: neither to linger nor to be significantly diminished in her capacities. Even her dying has something of Pat's legendary efficiency about it!

We gather today in the presence of the great mystery of life and death. When a person dies full of years, there is some easing of sorrow but there is still a gaping absence. Paradoxically, Pat will be powerfully present in that absence every time we recall that she has gone from our familiar world. For Pat's family it is the loss of a sister, sister in law, an aunt and great aunt who was very proud of her family and diligent in praying for you all, and when you need it, inviting the parish to join our prayers with hers. You will have many memories to share as you tell and retell stories of Pat's life and her place in yours. For this parish it is

the loss of an active member who took on so many roles and tasks over the decades, in the parish and the wider community.

And, remember when we thank God for those we love and have shared life with, we are saying, 'Thank you for revealing something more of Yourself in them.'

We gather today to celebrate the greatest of all the Church's prayers – the holy Eucharist, the thanksgiving prayer that unites us with the prayer of Jesus, now risen Christ, in his offering of his life to God.

We are proclaiming in this act of worship why it is, that even in the face of death and the sorrow of parting from those we love, we live in hope and trust in God. The Christian faith makes the bold assertion that in showing us the risen One on that resurrection morning, God is showing us that death is already swallowed up forever. Death no longer has dominion over the crucified One, and will not have dominion over we who share his humanity with him. Death has become a pathway to life transformed life changed forever. The way into that life is Jesus himself the way to God, the truth of our common humanity, and the life of God shared freely in bread and wine.

Jesus promised his friends that we would come again and take them to himself. Pat knew that coming again and again as she ate with us the bread of life, and drank with us the cup of salvation. Our eating and drinking now is but a shadow of the heavenly banquet in that house of many dwelling places to which we commit Pat in her dying.

Many here today will share the hope and trust in God which sustained Pat through her ninety years. Others may wonder how can such talk, such imagining of what is for us as yet unknown, make any sense? After all, none of us knows what is beyond this life with the kind of certainty many demand before they will believe.

And yet we have learnt from the world around us that life does indeed spring from what appears to us to be lifeless. Fire rages through the bush and leaves it in ashes; tree trunks are blackened and all is apparently lifeless. Yet, the first rains will cause green shoots to appear and soon what seemed dead to our eyes is transformed and the bush is

flourishing once more. Or as St Paul reminds us, the farmer must sow seed deep in the darkened earth and let the seed die before the new plants push through into the light and the sown paddocks are ready for harvest. So it is with our mortal bodies, St Paul said. What is sown as mortal will be raised immortal.

This is the hope and the promise to which we return today. Though we cannot 'explain' it, within the horizon of faith our hearts trust the God who alone brings life from death. We cannot always find the words to account for the hope we have and yet when we see it lived out in another we recognise what we share with them, and say a deeper 'yes' to God as we give thanks for them.

So let our 'eucharisting', our giving thanks today, be for the God of life whom Pat served all her days in her wisdom and compassion to friend and stranger alike, and in her sharing of herself with those closest to her and with us in this parish.

Our prayer for Pat today is that she now rest in peace and + rise in glory.