

Homily – Sr. Ruth Droege, OP – January 10, 2024

(Readings: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Gospel of John 1:1-14)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And, as we have just celebrated in this Christmas season, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. John's Gospel takes us to the very beginning, i.e. before time. We are swept into the milieu of the Spirit who breathes life into existence, **our** very existence. And, just as the Word became flesh, each of us becomes flesh, a Word spoken into existence, and each of us is called to begin the journey toward the fullness of life. We have the blessing of Scripture and the life of Jesus to demonstrate what it takes to live into that to which we have been called through our assent at Baptism – our first yes. We have deepened that Yes through Confirmation, and for us sisters, the Yes of our Vows. We are fortunate, too, to have the cloud of witnesses, St Paul refers to, to aid us in understanding and deepening our efforts to live into the gifts we have been given and to companion us home. Ruth has joined that cloud of witnesses. As I reflected on her life, her gifts and her struggles, I encountered evermore deeply, the Word that Ruth was and is for us.

From the beginning, Ruth was grounded in the physical, in movement. It is hard to imagine a time when Ruth was not engaged in swimming, for example; and, watching her swim lap after lap, I tried to imagine her as part of a synchronized swimming group – part of her college reality.

The third child of a well-off family in Ohio, she was born on the doorstep of the depression. She apparently had to find her own way as her parents, impacted by the depression, struggled to support her brother and sister through university studies.

When she finally settled into the discipline of education, she discovered she loved learning – moving from a B.S. in Education to a Masters in Education to a Doctorate in Theology. What a gift she brought with her as she entered the community. Yet, her way in theology was thwarted at the college and many of you will remember her teaching you logic, Latin, health or intro to psych. What humility that must have taken. Finally, though, she chaired the Religious Studies Department. The environment for her learning was marked every step of the way by cross-fertilization, in this case with and through the humanities and the

influence of Sisters Nicholas and Samuel. Ruth saw and drew on her understanding of the interconnectedness of all things. Surely some of you will remember her teaching the theology of the novel and of film, bringing the insights of religious themes forward in and through the characters, their development and activities, to see values, lessons, and truth where these could be found.

Those early general psych courses led her with the encouragement of her colleague, Bob Shukraft, to pursue a doctorate – one more refinement in her understanding of the human condition. Study first and foremost was Ruth's passion and her fidelity to study characterized her self-understanding as a Dominican.

Knowing that I owed my love and early familiarity with Vatican II to Ruth who introduced the study of the documents of Vatican II to the curriculum as soon as they were published, many years later, I dared ask her about doing something for Santa Sabina on Teilhard. She was reluctant, but a seed was sown and slowly sprouted, so that when she returned to San Rafael, she said she would be willing to work with us. Nothing would do but that she would tackle it by reading progressively all of Teilhard's works, plan a sequence for our discussions and then "teach" in our learning circle the only way she knew how – i.e. she would need to lay the groundwork before any random, uninformed discussion would ensue. We would meet to plan; and she would say as we concluded, you and Raya bring in the discussion – she was prepared to lecture to ensure we all learned the concepts so as to understand Teilhard's writings properly. In the end our efforts meshed. We who participated were better for her disciplined efforts, and we could all "read" Teilhard with more comprehension.

So, what is the relevance in her own process, what is her word for us? We might say, as T.S. Eliot has written, in end was her true beginning. For in the end, Ruth was transformed in her thinking and longing through Teilhard's views. She struggled both to understand his journey and concepts, and to make them her own. Ever so slowly she transformed and refined her focus on the spiritual life.

We on the sidelines watched her determination to stay upright, to walk, to move at all costs! More hidden was her struggle with depression, losing physical ground, dealing with her frustrations when she failed to live up to her ideals, as well as the frustrations when her self-determination and ability to be active were thwarted.

Yet, that signaled an even deeper process as Ruth moved from what Teilhard referred to as the *activities* of the spiritual life to the *passivities*. The *passivities* that he ponders moved him, and Ruth, to surrendering to deeper and deeper identification with the passion and death of Christ. She would say to me, I must resign myself . . . Yes, to letting go, to dying. It was not an easy letting go – fall after fall, until she could see no other doorway – surrender—“Into your hands, I commend my spirit.”

Teacher, student, faithful Dominican— lover of animals as well as the Divine Mystery, Ruth surrendered in peace.

We remember that small talk was never her way; her thoughts stirred within, hidden from us, until they came to us occasionally and creatively through her reflective pieces, demonstrating daily applications of the Divine Presence.

May Ruth now bask in Divine loving union with the One she sought with all the fibers and depths of her being.

May we ponder the Word she has shown us, reflecting on that final surrender to which we are called. For we, like she was, will be nourished at this table of Eucharist and by the Word we ponder and live.

Sr. Margaret Diener, OP

Short reading for the Vigil - As she reflected on the movie “Coco” in 2018, she wrote:

If we **as** members are open and accepting of our Christian life, by what we do in Christ and what we suffer in Christ, we bring Christ to life in the present and in hope for the future.

Teilhard sums this all up by writing: "Owing to the interrelation between matter, soul, and Christ, we bring part of the being which he desires back to God, in whatever we do. With each one of our works, we labour – in individual separation, but no less really – to build the Pleroma; that is to say, we bring Christ a little fulfillment.