

Sermon for the Funeral of Brenda Cookston

'The one who conquers will have this heritage.'

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[We do not gather here today to recognize a death. We know no death. The Church keeps countless icons and images of the saints who have passed on not because we remember the dead, but because we remember the deathless.]

[Therefore,] We are here to celebrate what the early Church would have called the *true birth*, what the Apostle's may have called the *going home to the Lord*; what the Lord Himself may have called *the hour of her glorification*: the eternal victory in Christ of Brenda Cookston against this world and all mortality, and her entrance into the mighty company of the immortal saints in radiance.

It is customary to speak a little of the life of the saint who has departed us *for but a little while*. I actually never got to know Brenda very well. She was rather private in her own way, and did not often speak about herself, at least with people she did not herself know well. However, I will relate to you a vignette that she once told me about her earlier life.

I do not remember every detail, but I will relate the story as best as I can recall. Apparently, she was with a friend of hers, driving at night, when they pulled into some establishment, a gas station or diner, or something of the like. As they got out of the car, a thief hiding in the shadows thrust himself out and attempted to steal her friend's purse. Being a sensible woman, Brenda reached into her glove compartment, grabbed her .45 automatic, and proceeded to shoot twice at the thief in order to, as they say, lay him low, and repossess the purse.

The thief, terrified of Brenda's free use of firearms, took flight, and vanished into the night. Again, being sensible, Brenda told her friend to get into the car, where

she produced for her yet another pistol. They then proceeded to drive about town, hunting down the thief, their loaded gats in hand, and justice on their minds.

I do not recall how the story ends, just that it involved the police.

Needless to say, though she was a loving parent and caring wife, she was, without a doubt, a person with a lot of 'fight' in her. This is most praiseworthy, as the Kingdom of God has great need of such fighting saints.

For what is this life but a war? It is and endless combat against the devil, against the fear of death, against our fallen flesh. Behind every anxiety and despair, every temptation from within or trial from without remain these three; the enemies of humanity. It is a war in which all these three conspire to tear from our hearts one thing, *the one thing needful*, that is, faith in the Lord.

For the Christian, like Job, may have all things torn from him; may have his possessions and money taken, may have his family dispersed or murdered, may have even his health devastated with sickness, even a *sickness unto death*; but if he retain the faith given to him in Holy Baptism, he shall say on the Last Day those words of our Lord '*Behold, I have overcome the world.*'

And yet how is it that we simple mortals, simple mortals even like Brenda, can face these enemies, and their countless guises and beguilements, and succeed? Behold, the glory of the Lord our God, the God who in His crucifixion has crucified death; who in His Descent into Hell has damned Satan to hellfire; who in His Resurrection has completed the eternal sacrifice, and undone sin forever, giving to *all that believe* atonement for all their iniquity.

Now death is but a door to the sapphire halls and crystal seas of paradise; now the devil is a laughing stock, an object of holy derision; now sin is but small burden and an annoyance, to be done away with forever in the Resurrection unto Life.

'Behold, I am making all things new.'

Declares the deathless One. '*Death shall be no more*' cries out our everlasting Victor, Jesus, the Christ, the beginning and end of all things, ever blessed be His name.

For in His conquest of all who oppose His kingdom, of all the ancient foes of His Church and His saints, He holds the field in victory, standing in the high places, bearing the golden standard of His divinity and the White banner of a humanity cleansed by His blood.

And He invites all to join Him in His conquest, you, His noble army. He invites you to join the endless ranks of angels which surround us; the seraphs which ever pray for us. For now there is nothing to fear, for fear itself has been consumed by God's Love.

Therefore He invites us, even as many years ago He invited Brenda through the doors of a simple church, speaking to us, *'In hunger I will redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword. You shall not fear devastation when it comes. At destruction and famine you shall laugh.'* For so it is written of a sensible woman in the book of Proverbs: *'She laughs at the future'*, which is to say, she laughs at death, which to those united to Christ, is but a sunset nap, even a well deserved one.

Who then will not lift up adoration to Our Great King, who by the sword of his tongue has judged the nations and redeemed his people? Who then will not sing praise now in this holy hall to Our Good Shepherd, who guides us, even in the darkest hour of faith, into the *green pastures* and the field of lilies, that God may adorn us in splendor forever, even as he adorns the flowers for but a day. Who will not raise up their voice in joy to Our Creator, who has created for this, His handmaiden, everlasting life?

All things are now ours through the victory of Christ, for we have been reborn heirs of His conquest, and sons over His Kingdom. All things are now ours: the new creation and the vaults of breathless heaven; The heavenly Jerusalem and the Twelve Gates.

And so shall Brenda in God's good time.

'For the one who conquers shall have this heritage.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon texts: Job 5:6-7, 17-26, Revelation 21:1-7, John 5:24-30