

Reflection

Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate

Joliet, IL

Sr. Geraldine Podobnik, OSF

By: Sr. Rosemary Huzl, OSF, Tuesday, March 18, 2025

As I reflected on the readings Geri chose for her funeral Mass, I asked myself, "What spoke to Geri in these readings? Why did she choose them"? I also reflected, "What do these scripture readings say to us about Geri's quiet but deep relationship with God?"

I was shocked but comforted by the announcement we received on Monday morning, March 10 that Geri had died. It read, "Sister Geri fell asleep in her hospital bed and woke up in the brightness of eternity. Geri, who offered support and comfort to the sick and suffering for most of her life, received God's comfort and peace."

"What is the meaning of life? Why is there so much suffering and injustice? Why is life worth living? Does God really care? It is no wonder that Geri chose a reading from the book of Ecclesiastes, the Old Testament book that asks some of the biggest and hardest questions people have.

The verses we just heard show us the cycles of life that God provides as a plan for us. There is a time for everything and all are appropriate at certain times. The right time for an action impacts the outcome. Geri's experience of living out these verses was real. Her life exemplified the virtues of hard work, gratitude, friendship, and joy for all the gifts God gave her. She found joy in the everyday opportunities of life: a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot; a time to weep and a time to

laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to keep and a time to throw away.

Although Geri wrestled with life's many questions, she also enjoyed exploring the everyday things that were part of God's plan for her. She loved to travel, plant flowers, feed the birds, sit on her back patio or in the garage and admire and appreciate nature. She liked watching sports and enjoyed listening to music especially the music of Andrea Bocelli who became blind at the age of 12 and sings professionally until today. A favorite song was a song his daughter listened to when studying for her nurses' degree. The title of the song is *Time to Say Goodbye*. Geri loved a lot of things but there were a few things she did not particularly enjoy like playing cards and board games and going to meetings, however she had plenty to share when she got there.

Hospitality was a way Geri often reached out. When her classmates came from a distance for community meetings, Geri offered to have them stay with her. One of her classmates said, "Not too many people knew the real Geri, especially how compassionate she was."

Hospitality was also a connection that I had with Geri. Timing is everything and the right time for something often impacts the outcome. Geri was a second year novice when I entered the convent as a postulant, but, we never really knew each other. It was in the 1970s when Geri and her aunt Cele came to vacation in Colorado

and stopped at the convent where I was living. I offered them to stay at the convent as their adventures took them around the area. Geri and her aunt never forgot the generosity and welcoming hospitality. We stayed in touch throughout the following years. There is a time for everything and all are appropriate at certain times.

In the 1980s my ministry was in New Hampshire where I was told that I needed to have major surgery. I called Geri and asked her if she could recommend a trusted oncology doctor who I could see for a second opinion. She made an appointment with a surgeon in Toledo at the hospital where she worked and I had the surgery there. She offered my mother and brother a place to stay when they came for the surgery and my recovery. There is a time for everything and all are appropriate at certain times.

Geri knew the secret to a peaceful life was to discover, accept and appreciate God's timing. On the day Geri was given her diagnosis, she called me and said, "Rosie, today my final journey begins," referring to a time to be born and a time to die.

In the second reading, the verse we heard from 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 emphasizes the idea of receiving comfort from God during difficult times so that we can offer the same comfort and support to those around us who are facing similar troubles. It reminds us of the interconnectedness of human experiences and the importance of empathy and compassion in helping others through their struggles. When we receive comfort and solace from God, it equips us not only to navigate our own challenges but also to be a source of strength and support for others in their times of need. Compassion is the outstanding characteristic focused on in this reading.

Geri's vocation as a nurse was a source of comfort, compassion, empathy and understanding to those who were suffering and those she cared for not only at Our Lady of Angels, Mercy Medical Center, Flower Memorial Hospital but as she cared for her family members, in particular, her mother, her uncle Joe and Aunt Cele, her brother Joe and recently, her brother Raymond.

I can't help but think that Geri is challenging each of us to reflect on those "everything experiences" from the first reading and the virtue of compassion from the second reading. Geri could be asking us: "When have you felt God's compassion? Consider how you might share that experience to uplift someone else." Finally, in the Gospel we hear about the people all gathered together at the end of time. On one side stand the sheep, those who have shown compassion and kindness to others. They are welcomed with open arms by Jesus, who commends them for their acts of love and service. On the other side are the goats, who are condemned for their lack of compassion and care for those who were hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, or in prison. The scene is tense as each person's actions and choices are presented before their judge.

When Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you did for me," He was revealing the answer about the essence of Christian faith: We directly show our love and service to God by serving others, especially those who are marginalized, oppressed, or in any kind of need. This means that our actions towards others are a true reflection of our relationship with God. So, Jesus and Geri are calling us to see Jesus in every person we encounter, especially those who are often overlooked or neglected by society.

As we continue to remember the life of Sister Geri and pray for her eternal peace, I extend my sympathy to her sister, Sue (Susie as Geri called you) to Mike, Geri's brother-in-law, her nephew and niece Kevin and Lisa, her grand nieces and nephews and to her devoted cousin Bill. Geri, or "Sis" as you all called her, loved you very much and often would share your accomplishments and how proud she was of all of you.

As we continue to remember Sister Geri, we ask her to look over us and help us be living examples of compassion, love and service to others as she showed us from her own life among those suffering and sick. May you rest in peace, Geri, my sister and friend.

**Sr. Rosemary Huzl, OSF
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