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Dear Friends,

Those who have gone before November 1 is All Saints' Day in the Church calendar, and November 2 we officially designate "The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed" which the Roman Church calls simply "All Souls' Day."

"All Saints' Day," November 1, was originally designated to remember those who lost or gave their lives for the sake of their faith, or those whose manner of life led them to be designated as holy ones, or "saints" in the history of the Church. While we certainly remember and honor distinguished Christians who lived later, the custom in the Episcopal Church is to reserve the official designation of "saint" to those of the first generation of Christians. So we celebrate Francis of Assisi but tend not to refer to him as St. Francis (except on page 833 of the Prayer Book...).

Then the next day, November 2, was set aside to remember other faithful departed members of our community.

Blurring the distinction I confess to being a little uneasy with those categorical distinctions, and, at St. Elizabeth's, we tend to observe both groups—the official "saints" and all the rest of us—together. I think there is something of God in everyone, an idea which shares something with our baptismal promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons. I think we are all at our best when we discern that part of God which we each bear and let our words and deeds show forth that part of our character to the world. I think of that in our baptismal promise to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.

One way we observe the day is to read, at all services on November 1 and the Sunday closest after, the names of everyone whose ashes have been interred in our Memorial Garden. You may also see their names on the bronze tablet on the north wall of the Narthex.

Roll Call As I share in the reading of that list, I think of it as something like a roll call of a portion of the larger community of St. Elizabeth's.

When I became the Rector here in January of 1993, there were about 34 names on the list. Now there are 122. I have dug most of those graves and shared, with Dick Andersen, Lynne Weber, Lu-

Anne Conner, Joan Conley, Susan Schink, Maylin Biggadike, and Cathy Quinn, in the interment of nearly all of those ashes. For most of those services, Ann Dowling has been standing by holding the Processional Cross, having led the congregation from the church into the Garden. And in the last few years, at the very end of the service outside, Master of the Bells Brian Dowling and his colleagues have concluded the liturgy with the glorious sound of the pealing of all of our bells.

Another Name One of the names not on that list is the name of my neighbor across the street and former member of this parish, Betty Dickinson. It was the gift of Betty's house by the Dickinson family which became the Dickinson Fund about which we have spoken and written often in the last few years.

Betty's grandson, David Turner, recently reminded me that it has been five years since his grandmother completed her time with us and entered her larger life with God. David mentioned the homily I delivered at Betty's funeral in Edgartown, and his comment sent me back to look at it again. In this month when we especially remember those who have gone on from this life to the next, on the fifth anniversary of Betty's having made that transition, and since we will not be reading her name in the list of those in the Garden, I thought I might share with you this part of her service from that day in Edgartown five years ago.

Here is the homily.

In Thanksgiving for the Life of Elizabeth Dickinson

The Lessons read at the Funeral—the first two having been chosen by Betty.

Old Testament Isaiah 25:6-9 On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

New Testament The Epistle to the Romans 8:37-39 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Gospel John 6:37-40 [Jesus said] Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.

The Homily

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight,
O Lord our strength and our redeemer.

I. Introduction I am John Hartnett, the Rector of Betty's home parish, St. Elizabeth's Church in Ridgewood, New Jersey, which is right across the street from her home there. I have known Betty for nearly eighteen years, and I stood here at St. Andrew's, before many of you, fourteen years ago to give thanks for the life of Dick Dickinson when he had completed his days among us.

And now we gather to give thanks to God for Betty, for the many gifts given to her which she shared so abundantly and graciously with us.

II. What we are about to do We cannot do all that needs to be done or said at this time in this homily or in this liturgy. We can mention some highlights, establish some context, and offer some perspective for our continuing thoughts and conversation.

And speaking of "continuing conversation," I hope that you will all come to the reception at Betty's house on Starbuck Neck immediately following this liturgy. Betty's family will join you all there after the interment at the Tower Hill Cemetery.

The reception, and the conversations which will follow, are important parts of what we do at a time like this. Please join us and continue there what we are doing here.

Betty was adamant that there be no formal eulogies or remembrances, perhaps because for her what mattered most was not public performance, but the more private individual conversations and stories which often form the structure of deeper relationships.

So share your stories, your experiences with Betty, and let them continue to be lively in and with you. That presence is not the full extent of Betty's continuing life—more on that in a moment—but it is a true and vital element of it.

III. Remembering As Jesus prepared to finish his earthly life, he gathered his closest friends, shared a meal, and commanded them—us—to remember and continue to tell the story: "I will be with you," he said, "whenever you remember and tell."

And I don't think he meant that only stories about him had the power to make present those who have entered the life that comes after this life.

So tell your stories, not only to make Betty present, but to remind yourselves of how present her life still is with yours.

And as you do this, just be aware that you are doing something close to what Jesus did and are engaging in a Godly and holy activity. As Betty so eloquently demonstrated, most of God's work is done outside of places like this by people who do not wear vestments from another time and place.

IV. The First Commandment "No Remembrances, No Eulogies, No exceptions," Betty wrote in her funeral memo.

So I will make no reference to her early travels, her schooling here and abroad, or to the early signs of the strong and independent spirit that was evident from her youth. I am bound not to talk about her time at Bennington; I make no reference to her stepping forward to serve in the Armed Forces in WWII; and I tell no stories of how she met and married Dick and how they raised a family and made such a distinguished life together.

I cannot tell stories of her sailing, her golfing, and her learning to fly—that is, I can say nothing of how Betty became a force to deal with in the air, on the sea, and on the land.

I really wanted to talk about her trip to Washington to see the WWII memorial, and how her history led us to choose 11:00 am on Veterans' Day for her service.

But No Eulogies, Betty said, so I cannot talk about any of that.

But I think it would be OK if you did, and if you want to hear her tell the stories, get a copy of David's wonderful DVD of his conversations with Betty. Maybe it was "No Eulogies" because she didn't want anyone else to tell her story when she and David had done such a good job just over a year ago.

V. Betty's Choices Among the other things I don't think Betty wants me to talk about is a lot of theology.

But this is not because Betty was not theological. She just was very wary of images and vocabulary which might sound exalted, but which would not stand the test of hard experience and tough-minded scrutiny.

Betty was a woman of deep and powerful faith, but—don't all gasp at once—she did it in her own way and on her own terms.

And if we pay attention to Betty's life, we can see the gifts of God—and indeed God's very nature—actively at work in the real world and not simply proclaimed in places like this by people like me.

Betty picked the reading from Isaiah we just heard—a vision of a people who were restored from exile and disgrace, from death and loss, and who returned home to abundance and celebration.

Betty shared with God—or God shared with Betty—that passionate desire to reach out to people in need or distress. She was careful not to be too visible in the process, and she would sometimes balance generosity with a remark which managed to be a little acerbic without being mean.

But behind that sometimes curmudgeonly façade, she was busy most of the time doing something good for people who needed it. She shared the gifts and generosity of God without the annoyingly sanctimonious wrapping in which the rest of us sometimes present it.

Betty went on to pick the passage we just heard from the Epistle to the Romans reminding us that nothing—not politics, not economics, not our own failings, not even death itself—*nothing* separates us from the love of God.

That love—real love—is not a reward to be bestowed or withheld, but is the base and foundation for all of our lives. And that is the reading Betty wanted you all to hear today.

Nothing, nothing will separate you, will separate Betty, will separate any of us at any time from the proactive love of God. God does not love us because we are good, God loves us so that we can grow more fully into being good, into being, frankly, more like God.

We do not begin our relationship with God with a gut-churning audition, and then do months of preparation, face down our fears to go on stage, and finally at the end hope for that explosion of applause—God begins with the applause, the standing ovation, and then says, "Now go out there and do your stuff—do my stuff."

At the very beginning of the Gospel of Mark, before Jesus has done anything, God says to him, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:11).

God's love is a free gift given to bless, heal, and restore. If we are lucky, we glimpse that kind of love briefly as parents. If we are very lucky, we get a second chance as grandparents. And the especially blessed get even another chance as great-grandparents.

And this was the word Betty wanted you to hear today, as if she were taking you by the shoulders, looking deep into your eyes and saying, "If you forget everything else, do not forget this: Nothing separates you from the love of God. Nothing."

And Betty's choices for this service stopped there.

But the liturgy calls for a Gospel reading, and it fell to me to select one. It was not that Betty had no feelings about the Gospel. In fact, what she said about choosing a Gospel reading was strong, clear, and, well, fairly negative: "No mansions," she said. And she was completely serious. "I don't care much about which Gospel reading you pick," was the way it came across to me, "but the one about 'many mansions' is Off The List."

Betty certainly knew about mansions, but I don't think she wanted you to leave this morning with the image of her settling in to her next home with splendid views, graciously understated furnishing, and guest accommodations for everyone.

I think Betty wanted to be the hostess, maybe even the behind-the-scenes underwriter—a role not unknown to her—but she certainly didn't want to be the center of attention.

In short, she takes the stance that Jesus articulates in this morning's Gospel: "I'm not here," he says, "to pursue my own agenda for my own sake and glory. The whole point of my being here is to do the will of the one who sent me—to show you what God values, how God loves people differently from the way we do, how God is not reviewing applications for a limited number of places, but how God's intent is that no one be lost, everyone be raised up, everyone not only be invited to the party but included in it."

And because God is God, this invitation is not just for a day, a season, or even a lifetime, but for all eternity.

Maybe Betty didn't choose this passage because it was her final test—would we see what she had done and know what she wanted us to hear at the end? And not just hear, but take into ourselves and make our own.

VI. Coming to the End In her last weeks Betty was surrounded by her family. At one point Betty's oxygen system stopped feeding her air, and she was switched to a portable supplier. Her numbers kept dropping and things did not look good, until Ian, who has served Betty and her family for nearly two decades, diagnosed the issue, replaced the generator with one of the reserve air tanks, and things began to improve at once.

A few days before she finished, Betty received Amanda, Briggs, and Crawford and was up, chatting with the adults, and playing with her great-grandson. It was a moment of joy and delight.

In that same week there was another oxygen problem, and Tracy not only identified the issue, but acquired the proper oxygen mask and managed the complex connections so that her mother would have all that she needed.

And throughout these last years, Ann and Richard have been something like an inspired and holy tag team, watching over Betty and taking care of everything she needed here in Edgartown, in Ridgewood, and wherever she went. That process had the occasional elements of a strategic competitive negotiation—Betty knew her family delighted to rise to challenges—and through it all

was deep love, respect, and unswerving commitment to all that was good and right. Blessings given often come back in the form of blessings received.

Music was perhaps the language of the spirit for Betty. Ann and Richard arranged for a piano to be installed right outside of her bedroom, and on her last night she asked David to play and sing for her.

So he sat down at the piano and offered the title song of his next show, “On a clear day, you can see forever.” In the middle of that dark night, in the last hours of her earthly life, Betty entered into that image of a day clear and unbounded by any limits, a place where you can see, and be, forever. Forever.

David finished singing, and Betty, who had not spoken much in the last day or so, said one clear word, “Encore.” Again.

VII. The final word If we had our way, we would start all over with Betty—“Give her to us again,” we would pray, “Let us delight in her presence again, one more time. Encore.”

And I think Betty, looking back, would say much the same thing. At the end of nearly 90 years to be able to say, with all of this life’s complex mixture of joys and griefs, “I would do it again” is a remarkable testimony to a life lived with grace, courage, and generosity.

Well, nothing separates us from the love of God, and to God nothing, and no one, is ever lost. It is not exactly an encore—not a repetition of the same thing again, but the promise of the God who brought all of this—all of us—into being is that when we finish here, we are not finished, but we continue in that life where we know that we are surrounded by love, and where we see that even death has not separated us from those who matter most to us, because nothing separates us from the love of God.

Let this be that clear day when we get just a glimpse of that “forever.” And let us give thanks to God for all of the gifts he gave to Betty, and for that greatest gift to her of a heart and mind and spirit which made sharing those gifts with us so natural for her, such a source of delight and joy to us all, and such a blessing to the whole world.

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Tower Hill Cemetery in Edgartown (down an unmarked road) is a beautiful place and very near the harbor. Betty’s grave is next to that of her husband and her son. A few yards away is the grave of Archer Harman, who had been the headmaster of St. George’s School in Newport when I was a student there. In retrospect, being the Head of an Episcopal School for boys in the 1960’s offered a remarkable set of challenges. In the midst of great social, cultural, political, and economic change and uncertainty, Archer, a layman and a mathematics teacher by training, led his community with grace, wisdom, compassion, and a strong faith. That faith was the more powerful for being so clearly and deeply integrated into his core identity and character. (Perhaps when attendance at Chapel was required for all 8 times a week, one did not need to add a great deal more in the way of explicit teaching.)

Betty and Archer, neighbors now, are not on our list of names read on All Saints’ Day, but they are both among the names I say quietly at every service when we are invited to name, silently or aloud, those who have entered their larger life with God. If you think about it, I am sure you have names—family members, friends, teachers, colleagues—whom you might include in your own list. Saying those names quietly aloud is one way to claim the reality of the Communion of Saints for

yourself. It is a way to claim, and to proclaim, that the communion and community which God creates is unbroken by death.

In this month of All Saints' Day, I invite you to the practice of remembering those names from your life. When we gather in our prayers, I hope you will share those names and, through your quiet words, fill St. Elizabeth's with the names as if to say them were to make all those beloved ones for that moment present among us. Imagine hosting a party to which you could invite everyone who had ever mattered to you, and they would all come and delight in your presence and in being with one another. That gathering is intended to be part of what happens when we gather each Sunday—it is part of what I think about every time we say that we join our voices with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.

So with Betty, and Archer, all the 122 names of those in the Garden, and all the names you add yourself, may we rejoice in the image of everyone together, and look forward to the time when what is an image now will be our reality forever.

The Rev. Cn. John G. Hartnett
Rector