

Rita Daubenspeck

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- *Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.*

What a privilege for all of us to celebrate the life, the faith, and the eternal life of Rita Brandmeier Daubenspeck, and to do so here in the Parish of Our Lady of Fatima of which Rita and Harold were founding members and perhaps the most generous supporters ever of this church, this parish, and its school. Rita knew all the pastors, from Fr. Hatcher to Fr. Raether. She supported them and at times, as she saw was needed, set them straight on a few matters. This is an historic day for this parish in celebrating her life.

We believe that Rita has entered into eternal life where our reading says she “will meet the Lord” and “shall always be with the Lord”. And as Mary and Martha, whose brother Lazarus had died, put their faith in Jesus as “the Messiah, the Son of God”, so too Rita believed in Jesus as they did. She too hears him say to her: “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if that person dies, will live...”

Who is Rita Daubenspeck who is now in Jesus with God? How did she get there and what does she teach us?

The sixth of the ten Brandmeier children from Capitol Hill, she went to St. Joseph’s School and Holy Names Academy. She was born a Catholic, reared in a Catholic home, and instructed in the Catholic faith in Catholic schools. Her faith was always from the beginning of her life to the very end the most important thing of her life, her anchor, her guide, her consolation, her joy, she hold to it adamantly. She once told me that she did not like our School of Theology and Ministry at Seattle U., being a Catholic and ecumenical school, because it seemed to make all Christian denominations similar. To her they were not. She was Catholic, and being Catholic was different, unique, true, her faith, the one. So her life teaches us how Catholic faith can be the very center and meaning of a person, can beautify that life, and can inspire generosity and care for others.

If Catholic faith gave meaning to her life, so too did family. Her family, all of whom she outlived except one sister, Kathleen, whom she wanted to outlive so she could say she took care of all of her family as well as all of Harold’s family, whom she did outlive, and dozens and dozens of their children whom she put through school and university. She treasured her daughter, Ann, and Ann and Richard’s son, Byron, and her grandchildren, Molly and Rebecca. How often she spoke of how much she enjoyed a special day each week with Ann. It was Ann who was with her at the very end. If you were a member of Rita’s wide family she helped you, helping the Holy Names Sisters because her own sister was a Holy Names Sister, helping the Jesuits because her own brother was a Jesuit, helping the Sisters of Providence because her mother was cared for and died at Providence Mt. St. Vincent’s. She gave of herself and of what God had blessed her with to all of them unstintingly, gladly. Her life teaches us to know who we came from and to be grateful and generous to them.

If any of us began to talk of the love of Rita and Harold—or Daubie as he was often called—we would never stop. Married when he was 35 and she was 25, they had 60 years of marriage and were so affectionately like newly-weds to the very end... and for Rita it was clear they were still married these eleven years since Harold's death. Whether here in Seattle and Magnolia, or in Kenai, Alaska, or on Maui, she was both his bride and his full partner and in many ways his very skilled manager. Rita could have managed anything. He was a businessman and she was his equal as a businesswoman. How wonderful to witness the soft, warm, tender affection between these two extraordinary, capable people and their admiration for each other. However independently-minded they each were—and they were!—they belonged to one another and were one. Rita with Harold teaches us what living out the grace of the sacrament of marriage can become.

I had some advantages in knowing Rita. They lived in Magnolia and in this parish and so did my parents. They were Alaskans and so was I. Harold graduated from Seattle College in 1937 and I became its president. Harold and I even shared the same birthday of August 3rd and we were exactly 30 years apart in age. I celebrated frequently “home Masses” for them on Maui and I was a priest—like Fr. John Hatcher here—whom she confided in as well as set straight when she thought I or we needed it. I thought Rita Daubenspeck was one of the most beautiful women I ever knew—Daubie agreed—and always so gracefully dressed, turned out, tall and erect. She once told me her five rules for aging well:

1. Don't fall!
2. Keep active physically!
3. Keep alive mentally!
4. Stand erect!
5. Smile!

She lived these rules didn't she as all of us her friends know?! She teaches us in this too about how we should live.

On two occasions she gave me a small more personal view into her soul. I quote from a card she sent me ten years ago: “I experienced an amazing sense of peace during this Christmas period. Just one day while I was driving I realized I had been so blessed—it was like someone just putting a shawl or sweater over my shoulders. How blessed I am!” This was a year after Harold had died. That “someone just putting a shawl or sweater over (her) shoulder” certainly was God protecting and comforting her with the Holy Spirit at Harold's bequest for his bride. She was indeed blessed, but so are we all; hopefully we will know this in our souls as she did on that day caught off guard while driving.

The second revelation I'll mention of something of her soul—though there were many more—occurred the last time I saw her. As we walked to the front door after my usual visit on a Sunday afternoon, which I will dearly miss, she stopped me and said, “Sometimes when I look out at the vista from this house I have a deep spiritual sense of looking out on eternity and I feel that in that view of eternity I am accompanied.” Rita knew where she was going; God opened her soul just slightly to know that, and again she felt accompanied by God in God's Spirit but inextricably also by Harold with God, not just covered by a shawl but accompanied into the eternity she saw. Don't any one of us wish to have just a portion of that blessing in our souls? How we can rejoice for her in her journey to eternity and be a little less afraid of our own journeys into eternity.

Thank you Rita for these revelations from God meant not just for you but for all of us though you for us.

Did any of us, friends, parishioners, consecrated religious, relatives, caregivers ever do for or give to Rita anything for which we did not receive a card of thanks? Rita used to say that graphologists believed that if a person's longhand writing sloped upward it was a sign that the person was optimistic. Her's sloped upward! She was optimistic and she always expressed thanks. She used to note which of the persons who received a gift from her wrote or called to say thank you. This Mass is a thank you, a Eucharistia — which is what the word means — to Rita Daubenspeck for her Catholic faith, her family, her marriage, her counsel and friendship, her gracious goodness and generosity, her love, and her teaching us how to journey to where she is with Christ, in God, with Our Lady of Fatima and with Harold.