

Reflecting on Olive's life

It's possible that you never knew that Olive Murdy lived. When she died this past July she had no "celebrity" obituary.

Statistics tell us that 108 people die every minute. Olive was one among that number of "faithful departing." On the other side of time, I believe she was also part of that "number, when the saints come marching in!"

The psalmist, writing 3,000 years ago, said: "Seventy is the sum of our years, or 80 if we are strong." Olive was among the strong, living into her 80s. Her final years were marked by a gradual decline. Death is an enemy in the sense that it ends the only life we know on this earth plane. Death is a friend in the sense that it frees us from the limitations of declining health and increased limitations. We are freed to share the very freedom of God.

Olive was part of that "greatest generation," which had a sense of living for something greater than just their individual selves. On the surface her life seemed quite ordinary. She was a teacher by profession. She married and had children. She loved them, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She was also divorced. But she even turned the pain of her divorce into a ministry by helping to set up support groups for the separated, widowed and divorced at her home parish of Sacred Heart in Glyndon as well as at St. Joseph in Cockeyville. At one point back in the 80s, there were support groups for separated, widowed and divorced in about one third of our parishes.

Olive was not a sentimental person. She was practical. She was not about "hearts and flowers." She was about doing things that matter. I recall when her grandchildren would visit on vacation, that she would take time to tutor them. Even in retirement, she was ever the teacher.

She was a devout Catholic. But she was not above questioning church practice. "I don't know why the church keeps shooting itself in the foot by not ordaining married men and women. With fewer priests we're going to lose the younger generation!" Olive's words proved to be right. The latest studies indicate that a third of all

baptized Catholics now belong to other denominations. Another third of all baptized Catholics practice no faith at all!

“Who wants to be right?” she would reply. “I’d rather see our churches filled with young people!” I told you she was practical.

Olive gave all that she had during life, and even gave her body to the Anatomy Board at death. “If using my body helps someone else, why not donate it? What’s so great about rotting away in a box?” I told you she wasn’t sentimental.

Two final stories. Olive became a sort of mother figure for me when my own mother died in 1983. I took Olive with me to Notre Dame College in Indiana when I was asked to give a workshop at their annual separated, widowed and divorced workshop. On the way, we stopped in Toledo because I wanted to see the Toledo Mud Hens play a baseball game.

As we pushed through the crowds, I wondered aloud if we were going in the right direction. Undaunted, Olive stopped the next police officer and asked: “Officer, can you tell me where I’m going?” With a wry smile, he replied: “No, Ma’m. That’s one thing I can’t tell you!” Olive mostly knew where she was going!

I drove out to visit her in Reisterstown one last time just before she died. All the way out I kept sending love to her. As I stood next to her bed, I said: “Olive, I’ve been sending love to you! I’ve been spending love to you.” She opened her eyes and said: “And I caught it! I caught it!”

Those were her last words to me. She caught the love. And, when she died, Eternal Love caught her!

All are welcome to come to a memorial Mass for Olive, Sept. 4, in the “little church” at Sacred Heart in Glyndon.