



MEMORIAL FOR VERA CROSS
ST JOHN'S OF LATTINGTOWN
BY THE REV SIMON FOSTER, RECTOR

Vera Cross... Boy, we could be here all day I think, but we're not going to be. But there's so much that could be said about the person we give thanks for today.

I owe dear Frank and Nancy Polk very much for very many things, but I and this parish owe them so much for introducing Vera to us. All those years ago, with a lot less gray hair than I have now, I met Vera in hospital for the first time. A conversation resulted and a great friendship and spiritual connection began with Vera – someone I dared to christen: “The Archbishop of the Sunrise Residential Facility.”

For the way that she acted as the organizer for our newly instituted Blessing of Animals in that home (and one year there were nearly more animals than adults present). She acted as our agent for the Carol Service

that we hosted there for a number of years and still do and other things too. So it seems to me to call her the Archbishop of Sunrise is kind of relevant.

I know, when she could, she loved coming to this church, and her links with things here meant a lot to Vera. They cheered her and gave her some peace and some solace too. I'm not sure how many people knew this but Vera, as I became aware very early on, had a great theological and questioning mind. And an honest, not frightened, but vulnerable and searching faith. For example, no parishioner has given me books to read on Outer Space. Maybe she thought I was from Outer Space. But she had a fascination and a curiosity for the universe, and indeed universes, and whether there were indeed creatures out there, apart from us.

I loved to sit in her room in her home and talk theology and very regularly over the years since we first met in hospital. She and I often prayed over the phone too, where she would call me here at the office or indeed at the rectory, on many a night, and it was a joy to pray with her.

Now, just when you might be thinking I'm canonizing Vera, don't get me wrong. Her phone messages and our conversation were not all ecclesiastical and theological. For example, Vera would call her Rector, to let me know when there was a British sitcom on the television, or when there was a program I ought to take note that it was on. Every time there was a storm, Vera Cross called me up to make sure that I'd be okay and that I was alright. And she was always panicky when I was in England, in case I never made it back. That was the kind of person that Vera was.

I have to tell you too, and this is a note of personal privilege I guess, she kept her Rector going on so many English comfort foods. She would buy me and send me through the mail Christmas puddings. She'd give me English chocolate. And I have to

tell you she gave me rather a lot of champagne over the years that I have known her. She also got me many British magazines, like 'Majesty' and 'Britain' and others. She took out for me annual subscriptions and I have to tell you – I never asked for these magazines! I guess that was indoctrination lest I forget where I was from.

She and I, indeed, had a deep respect for our English roots and our history. She had been born in London; you know about her working with the Red Cross, her helping navigate troops through the streets of London, her serving through the Blitzkrieg, and so much else. She weathered the Blitz like she weathered everything else – with strength of character. And we know she was so strong. She was tough alright, wasn't she?

She weathered her illness, and the challenges of life, of one sort or another, but she weathered them, and she came through them, out at the other side. She had, as I would like to say, an indomitable spirit. It saw her through the ups and downs of life, and for me and for us all, she was someone we so admired, valued and cherished. I know we are all go-

ing to miss Vera, and I say that from very deep in my own heart. I know Ginny, Ross and Sarah, and you dear family and friends are going to miss her so very very much indeed.

Now since Vera passed, and was released from the suffering that some of us have seen her go through over these weeks and months, I have been picturing Vera in earlier days. Picturing her wicked laugh and that twinkle in the eye. Her sitting, presiding over the Parish Carol Service at Sunrise on that elevated chair. I picture her conducting the Carol Service too sometimes. I remember on one pastoral visit that I made to her at Sunrise, in the middle of the conversation she turned to me out of the blue and said “Simon, I have a serious question to ask you” (and I always panicked when she went into that mode). And this is what she asked me: “can you tell me Simon, why there was a rabbit hutch at the front of St. John’s at Easter?” I smiled, and she saw the look of consternation on my face. Of course for those of you who can’t worship here at Easter, at the time we had a copy of an Easter Garden Tomb that someone put at the front of the

church. But from where Vera sat she referred to it, somewhat indelicately, as a rabbit hutch. I have to say, that it has never been seen since at the front of the church.

The Anglican Episcopal Church is a place for honest, exploring persons of faith, and Vera epitomized that. Her faith was not pompous nonsense, it was not pie-in-the-sky. It was a very down-to-earth, real, and wrestling faith.

Thank you Vera, for your love and care for this church, for your priest, for your family and friends. For all those countless people you mentored with ice skating – some I have seen letters from them, and they went on to be ice skating coaches too.

Vera, thank you for being an inspiration. I’m sure never going to forget you. You are part of us, and that surely is the ‘Communion of Saints’ that the Church talks about - this side of the other side of eternity we are one and whatever else heaven is about it is about this unbroken link across time and eternity. Our loved ones, the Church believes, are in God’s nearer presence now, safe for-

ever, are one.

I'm really grateful, I don't know about you, that Vera is free of fear, of pain, of anxiety; fear of sadness; that she is at rest. She's free from the restrictions of the body. She is at peace, free. Having changed people's lives and the world in so many ways, as our next speakers will also show.

I want to say this though, as I conclude. For me, and I say this totally up front, after twenty years, this year, of ordination, I would like to say that due to Vera Cross, I became more of a priest because of her being part of my own journey. She deepened my love and respect for humanity and for people's journeys and their faith journeys.

Thank you for being a great human being Vera. No, not 'St. Vera the Perfect,' but still Saint Vera to me. Patron of honesty and integrity, and a wicked sense of humor too.