

**Joan Fontaine Funeral
December 11, 2021**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,
And the power of God known in the Spirit.
Amen.**

The liturgy that we are using ... this worship service ... is the Church's way of doing two things: Acknowledging the transition from life in this world to a life in another realm; and providing comfort to those who have experienced the loss of someone they love dearly. This liturgy uses highly symbolic language to express what our spiritual ancestors knew almost intuitively.

Long before there was any formal religion ... long before there were libraries full of theological tomes ... there were people who lived very close to the land ... very close to nature ... who comforted each other in time of loss, and sent their deceased loved ones into a spiritual realm with rituals developed out of their own experiences. Around the world, thousands of years before there was even a written language, people experienced something beyond themselves ... especially at times of bringing life into this world, and at times when life ended. These people ... our spiritual ancestors ... found ways to acknowledge the spirit in every living thing. And they recognized that that spirit did not die when the earthly vessel no longer had life in it.

The words we use today are a direct product of those experiences and rituals of our spiritual ancestors. The difference is that our spiritual ancestors were connected to words of their rituals by the intimacy of shared and collective experiences. For us ... today ... we are only connected by the words written in our worship books, and spoken by those who lead our worship.

What does this have to do with Joan and her death? I am a firm believer that we are "spirit people" living in an earthly vessel as opposed to a human being who has a characteristic of being spiritual. This may seem like semantics, but I believe this spirit is greater than what can be expressed in any one human being. And, I also believe that the spirit that is alive in each of us is also alive in a realm that is beyond us.

Joan's spirit was alive in her while she was with us. It is also alive in another realm ... not fully apart from us, just separated by a filter. Every once and a while that spirit ... Joan's spirit ... will break through that filter when we least expect it and we will know that Joan is with us ... fully present ... in spite of the fact that her life in this world has ended.

In our world today ... with medical science the way that it is ... we all too often think of life and death as binary ... that is, we are either alive or we are dead. Yet my experience with people who are in the process of dying is that death is more like a veil that is permeable. I have been with persons who have told me about their experience of encountering others who have gone before them in dreams, visions, and the morning fog. I have also known times in my own life

when someone I loved dearly, but is no longer alive in this realm, has come to me as if they were sitting right next to me.

This all may be heretical, but it seems to me that our spiritual ancestors ... those stone age people who lived close to nature ... were expressing their experience of this spirit realm in their midst in their rituals. We may feel like we are more sophisticated in our understanding of this spiritual realm ... just look at the number of books we have all read explaining the unexplainable. But, in the end, our liturgy ... our rituals today ... have their roots in what our spiritual ancestors of thousands of years ago knew well.

We have experienced a loss in Joan's death. She is no longer with us in this realm, and that is final. However, we comfort each other in our loss, and we send Joan's spirit into another realm with our blessings, knowing that we will connect once again.

You would not be here today if you had not connected to Joan's spirit in some way during her earthly life. Her spirit is still alive.

I'll end with a Meditation Before Kaddish. Kaddish is the prayer said by Jewish mourners after the death of a loved one. This meditation appears in a Reform Judaism prayer book:

Meditations Before Kaddish From the Mishkan T'filah

When I die give what's left of me away
to children and old men that wait to die.
And if you need to cry,
cry for your brother walking the street beside you.
And when you need me, put your arms around anyone
and give them what you need to give me.

I want to leave you something,
something better than words or sounds.
Look for me in the people I've known or loved,
and if you cannot give me away,
at least let me live in your eyes and not your mind.

You can love me best by letting hands touch hands,
and by letting go of children that need to be free.
Love doesn't die, people do.
So, when all that's left of me is love,
give me away.

Amen.