

**Mass of Christian Burial  
For Lorraine Barbara Humphrey, IHM  
Dec. 22, 2021  
Homily, Andrea Lee, IHM**

**Scripture Readings:**

Hosea 2: 16-17, 21-22

Luke 1: 39-56

If you ever walked into Honey Humphrey's room in Ligouri, on the far southwest corner of the windowsill, past the eight bookcases revealing her eclectic literary tastes, and the brightly colored Dollar Store boxes overflowing with cards and letters from her legions of friends and adoring family, you'd see a casually drawn, inexpensively framed art piece featuring a quote that captures Honey's soaring contemplative spirit.

That spirit, reflected in the Hosea reading Honey chose for today, existed comfortably alongside her friendly, family centric and socially engaged self, more evident in the Gospel just proclaimed.

The quote on her windowsill was this – "*on the wings of immense desire.*"<sup>1</sup> Drawn to the quote and what it revealed about the woman who displayed it with such unmistakable prominence, I did not know its source, only later learning it was Dante speaking in the *Inferno's* fourth canto.

As Dante himself and commentators explain, the steep 45 degree angle that is created when a circle is bisected twice and then the medial quadrant is drawn– necessitates "*wings of immense desire*" to attempt the steep and exhausting climb from where we are to where we imagine God to be. Honey's own writings suggest she believed the same about her own longing for God and her worry that intimacy and union might forever elude her.

Taken in isolation, the Hosea reading suggests a private, exclusive relationship of intimacy between the Lover, God, and God's beloved Lorraine. Without succumbing to saccharine interpretations of this text popular in days past, Honey's own spiritual search often pivoted around relentless longing.

This spousal imagery in Hosea, described only dimly and clumsily in human words (and inscribed on the ring of every IHM) comes closest to describing Honey's powerful inner life and the intense longing of this good woman for Godly intimacy:

*Day after day, O lord of my life, (she prayed using the poet Tagore's words, when using words at all)  
shall I stand before thee face to face.*

*In this laborious world of thine, tumultuous with toil  
and with struggle, among hurrying crowds  
shall I stand before thee face to face.*

*And when my work shall be done in this world,  
..., alone and speechless  
shall I stand before thee face to face.<sup>2</sup>*

So, you see – intimate, direct connection with God, as noted also by Karl Rahner, is not something merely longed for, perhaps for some distant day, but daily experienced over months, years, and decades.

The Gospel presents a different, less ethereal image of holiness. Mary – mother of God, actually possessing the divine Jesus within her - travels in typically human and humble fashion to the home of her cousins, Elizabeth and Zachariah. Human relationships abound here – having left her parents, Anna and Joachim, and perhaps Joseph; this younger woman travels to her older, trusted mentor for advice and companionship where she's welcomed into her extended family home, after long travel and all its experiences.

What was it like to be both humanity's most contemplative mystic and human of mothers - the Mother of God and mother of Jesus as well – when he said his first word, needed his diaper changed, threw a temper tantrum outside the temple? What was it like to carry Jesus in her womb and to ponder what that might mean, while still keeping up with the daily duties of a young, unmarried Jewish woman?

Questions never to be resolved or integrated with an either/or dualism, but rather with a full-hearted both/and response. As Tagore describes it:

*Come out of your meditations, and leave aside your flowers and incense! What harm if your clothes become tattered and stained? Meet and stand by God in toil and sweat.<sup>3</sup>*

Tagore continues in ways familiar to those who knew Honey best. “*You have made me known to friends whom I knew not. You have given me seats in homes not my own. You have brought the distant near and made a sibling of the stranger.*”<sup>4</sup> And so it was, with

her novices; in Vietnam, Guelph, the Northwest Province, Royal Oak, and Cincinnati; at Marian, Lakes and Marygrove; Kendallwood and the Soup Kitchen, and finally here in the library and the social center of her own room.

Shy, contemplative Honey would fret, *“I am uneasy at heart when I have to leave my accustomed shelter; I forget that there abides the old in the new, and that there also God abides.”*<sup>5</sup> *It is,* she often prayed, *“this one constant Companion of my endless life who links my heart with endless bonds of joy to the unfamiliar.”*<sup>6</sup>

The critical awareness here is the linking, aligning, and conjoining of a profoundly deep contemplative spirit with an active, engaged, fun, altogether human life.

Honey did this with splendid guides along the way – they know who they are. As Dante wrote, *“I had to fly, I mean with rapid wings, following the guide who gave me hope and was my light,”*<sup>7</sup> and the guide said,

*“Don’t squander any steps. Keep climbing the mountain after me until we find some expert company.”*<sup>8</sup>

*“The one companion of my endless life,”*<sup>9</sup> Honey noted in her journal. *“It was that vague fragrance that made my heart ache with longing.”*<sup>10</sup>

Two questions that Honey asked me often – in these later months, almost daily - revealing her ability to effortlessly blend the hidden life of a solitary mystic with that of everyone’s sweet and kind friend. Perhaps she asked similar questions of you.

*Have you seen Larry?*

*How are the boys?*

Always the same questions – repeated not so much, I think, because her memory was failing - but because she knew these were questions of signal importance.

In the first- *“Have you seen Larry?”* she is referring to the Jesuit I see for spiritual direction. The question itself I knew was code to ask me about the state and needs of my inner life and to ask herself the same.

In the other – “*How are the boys?*” she is talking about my son and his two young sons – code for the amazingly diverse human communities in which Honey found herself embedded.

Linking these two questions reveals the quiet, gracious both/and genius of our Honey. Indeed, the readings today do indeed permit a clear place for Hosea’s intimate relationship with God and one for Mary rushing across the hills to her cousin’s home, her still scared “yes” reverberating within and around her.

The words immediately following the spousal declaration of Hosea in the Scripture – as those that follow and reveal the why of Mary’s *Magnificat* - are, in fact, one and the same, both revealing the point of it all – justice and mercy.

A lot of poetry enriched and informed Honey’s life and – well - she could move easily from a “behind the couch dramatic telling” of the *Jabberwocky*,<sup>11</sup> to a well memorized *Hound of Heaven*<sup>12</sup> to the profound, Nobel Prize worthy words of Tagore. Tagore’s *Gitanjali*, with which I’ve laced these reflections, is mysticism, but not a mysticism that relinquishes personality, or seeks to become absorbed exclusively in God, but one, with “*all the faculties of soul at highest pitch, eagerly sets forth to meet the Living God of all Creation.*”

When Rob told me that Honey had chosen Hosea and the “readings of the day,” I gulped at first, before realizing it is hard to go wrong with the Advent readings. Hosea coupled with the *Magnificat* Gospel, combine perfectly to reflect this seeker of God and liver of life, the woman we honor and celebrate this morning.

And now, what would Honey say? Perhaps Tagore again. Not two weeks ago, I began reading this poem to her from a ragged copy in Honey’s own calligraphied handwriting. She finished it from memory.

*Time after time I came to your gate*<sup>13</sup>  
*With raised hands, asking for more and more.*  
*You gave and gave, now in slow measure; now in sudden excess.*  
*I took some, and some things I let drop;*  
*some lay heavy on my hands;*  
*some I made into playthings and broke them when tired.*  
*Till the wrecks and the hoard of your gifts grew immense, hiding you.*  
*And the ceaseless expectation wore my heart out.*  
*Take, O take has now become my cry.*  
*Shatter all from this beggar’s bowl;*  
*Put out this lamp of the importunate watcher;*

*Hold my hands, raise me from the still-gathering heap of your gifts into the bare infinity of your uncrowded presence.*

This *uncrowded presence* is now Honey's reward; It is lovely! It is intimate! It does indeed magnify the Lord she served with so much love and intent.

### **Poetry Sources:**

<sup>1</sup> Dante: The Divine Comedy, Inferno - Purg iv.28-29).

<sup>2</sup> Tagore, *Gitanjali* ( a collection of 103 English poems, largely translations by Rabindranath Tagore

<sup>3</sup> Tagore, *God in the World, Gitanjali*

<sup>4</sup> Tagore, *Gitanjali* 63)

<sup>5</sup> *Gitanjali* 63

<sup>6</sup> *Gitanjali, (Old and New)*

<sup>7</sup> Dante, The Divine Comedy (*II-iv; 7-29*)

<sup>8</sup> *Dante* The Divine Comedy (*II-iv: 37-39*)

<sup>9</sup> *Gitanjali, 63*)

<sup>10</sup> *Gitanjali 20, The Lotus*

<sup>11</sup> *Jabberwocky*, Lewis Carroll

<sup>12</sup> *Hound of Heaven*, Francis Thompson

<sup>13</sup> Tagore from *Fruit-Gathering* .[Translated by the author)