Reflections-for Funeral of Sister Mary Ann O’Ryan, OSB
Oct. 10, 2020
By Sister Judith Murphy, OSB, Prioress
Micah 6:6-8; 2 Corinthians 4: 14-5:1; Matthew 25:34-40

Our Benedictine community is pleased to welcome you who are able to be here from the O’Ryan family—you who have known Mary Ann the longest. We come to celebrate and give thanks for Sister Mary Ann’s life, as she lived it with and for all of us; you and we come together to this table as we have learned to do—in praise and thanks to our God, to ask for the grace we need for living, just as Mary Ann did throughout her lifetime. We join ourselves with Jesus Christ’s offering of himself. We bring to this table our lives and concerns, our hopes, and all that matters to us—to join all this in our praise and thanks to God.

We thank God for the life Mary Ann lived, and shared with us and with so many that her life touched. The scripture readings we heard today are one she favored and ones that reflect what motivated her and inspired her. The simple words from Micah were there on her office desk and in her bedroom, where she would see them daily:

**What is good has been explained to you, O mortals; this is what God asks of you:**
*only this: to act justly; to love tenderly; and to walk humbly with your God.*

And from Matthew, the story of the end time when rewards are given to those respond to the needs of others:

**Whenever you did it for the least of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me.**

And Paul rejoices that the grace of God is reaching more and more people—to cause thanksgiving to overflow to God’s glory. The kingdom of God is within us and among us and around us, and we are called share it in our lifetime.
Who and what helped her become the Mary Ann we know and love? I started a list but it got too long:

- Vatican II and the hope of *Lumen Gentium* and the Church in the Modern World
- The fidelity and commitment she learned at home
- Long-standing friendships
- Her attitude toward herself
- Her belief in the possibility of change
- Her love of history and geography and cultures and peoples, and travel
- The opportunity to speak at stockholders’ meetings about justice issues
- Her love for this community and the members of this community.

**Only this, wherever: act justly, love tenderly; and walk humbly with your God.**

In his book *St. Benedict’s Wisdom and the Life of the Church*, Luigi Gioia has an extended discussion of the church in postmodern times, and he says that the potential of monastic community life can teach a fundamental lesson in our times: *that monastics take a certain distance from the world to enter into a more profound relationship with it; they do not choose community life in order to withdraw...in order to be sheltered from difficulties; rather they choose it because community life lived responsibly is the most effective way of testing the authenticity of self-knowledge, the authenticity of one’s own conversion, the authenticity of one’s relationship with God.* This reminded me of Mary Ann. Mary Ann believed in the possibility of authentic community life and she supported it in so many ways.

We have heard from colleagues and students who sent condolences on hearing of her death. I want to let one of them tell about her influence. This is what a teacher colleague wrote, responding to the news of her death:

**She was to me a colleague and mentor; statuesque in beauty; sweet in disposition; simple in life, with a complexity of intellect that exemplified what Benedict and**
Scholastica called their flock to: that flock she came to join, to lead, and to love. She was an historian, a theologian, and educator. **Students** from university to 8th grade (and high school and 1st grade too) were blessed to receive her patient, consistent, and highly organized leadership. We who were on staff with her received the same. My memories of Mary Ann are filled with laughter, joy and profound respect. (Although there were some disagreements about the Cubs and the Sox), she is worthy to be released from baseball purgatory. I ask our Creator God in Heaven to bless her with peace and power. She will deliver in angelic spirit for evermore.

And to this we can all say: Amen.