As I was thinking about our Sister Joan Gannon, I got to trying to imagine how Joan would describe the Kingdom of God. Mind you, I never heard her describe the Reign of God, but I am going to try to guess about what story she would tell about the Reign of God.

We have had ample opportunity in recent days to hear about the late senator John Lewis’s commitment to the Beloved Community and how he was motivated to build toward the Beloved Community in the activities of his life. I think that what he meant by the Beloved Community was “the Reign of God” --whether here or hereafter. The way Joan led her life may give some hints about how she would describe God in her life. I believe she knew her life was a gift from God, a loving and gracious gift from God. Her family had their share of difficulties when she was growing up. They would have known and dealt with the realities of the Great Depression, and it seems that Joan learned from home that despite difficulties we can love one another and support one another in all the ways we know how. She was dedicated to her siblings and cared for and about them faithfully in ways that were supportive of them when she could. We just heard a reading from the book of Wisdom, that suffering can lead to wisdom. We know that coping with suffering, whether our own or another’s could lead to anger or bitterness, or as we saw in her life, suffering can develop into patience, acceptance, understanding, wisdom and appropriate generosity. Her generous action, whether to family, in community, or with homebound St. Jerome’s parishioners, was a way of being present, caring enough to share a conversation, play a game of cards, or work on a puzzle.

When we consider the list of programs and studies she pursued, we can deduce that she saw this world and the ways of nature as encouraging invitations to find out more --whether more about understanding the ways of science, or more about the ways of thinking about theology, or more about what make us human beings tick. The coursework she studied, and the lengths she went to pursue grants to support her study, and the variety of places she went to study highlight an able and inquisitive mind that kept her going in pursuit of learning throughout her life. And maybe that inquisitive mind also gave her energy for ministry and service to others when she could help, and her wry sense of humor. I think she lived out her understanding of the Reign of God.

I think also she would agree with Peter’s conclusion in today’s story from Acts …in accepting the Gentiles into the faith// after struggling with the very idea……he said, //now I see that God does not have favorites and that anyone from any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable and a child of God.// In pondering Matthew’s telling of the story of the end times// and Jesus saying to the just/, You, Come, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you// for when I was thirsty //and ignorant //and a stranger// or sick //or imprisoned//, you gave me drink, you made me welcome, you visited me, you took me in. I could almost hear her way of asking the question: “When did I do those things? She did
have a way of articulating questions that could sound mildly confronting…//And she now hears the King answer, I tell you solemnly, insofar as you did it to one of these sisters and brothers of mine, you did it to me.

In this time of COVID-19 with the precautions we must observe and the losses we all feel, may we take to heart as a guiding anthem the words of the psalm refrain today: *Shepherd us, O God, beyond our wants, beyond our fears, from death into life.*