

## Ann Cassidy's Funeral Remarks

Bishop Cameron Ford, February 16, 2018

Brothers and sisters, I sincerely feel that it was a privilege to have had an association with Sister Ann Cassidy. She was and is a remarkable woman and we will miss her dearly. Of the death of a loved one, our newly ordained Prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, once said:

“Death separates “the spirit and the body [which] are the soul of man.” (D&C 88:15.) That separation evokes pangs of sorrow and shock among those left behind. The hurt is real. Only its intensity varies. Some doors are heavier than others. The sense of tragedy may be related to age. Generally the younger the victim, the greater the grief. Yet even when the elderly or infirm have been afforded merciful relief, their loved ones are rarely ready to let go. The only length of life that seems to satisfy the longings of the human heart is life everlasting.”

Isn't that an interesting thought? There seems to be something deep down inside all of us that longs for loving relationships that go on forever. I would claim that this deep feeling is a sense that things really are and really can be eternal. Even those who have argued themselves out of a belief in God and an afterlife are not immune to its pull. President Thomas S. Monson described one such individual. He said:

“Robert Blatchford, in his book *God and My Neighbor*, attacked with vigor the accepted Christian beliefs, such as God, Christ, prayer, and immortality. He boldly asserted: “I claim to have proved everything I set out to prove so fully and decisively that no Christian, however great or able he may be, can answer my arguments or shake my case.” He surrounded himself with a wall of skepticism. Then a surprising thing happened. His wall suddenly crumbled to dust. He was left exposed and undefended. Slowly he began to feel his way back to the faith he had scorned and ridiculed. What caused this profound change in his outlook? His wife died. With a broken heart, he went into the room where all that was mortal of her lay. He looked again at the face he loved so well. Coming out, he said to a friend “It is she and yet it is not she. Everything changed. Something that was there before is taken away. She is not the same. What can be gone if it be not the soul?” Later he wrote: “Death is not what some people imagine. It is only like going into another room. In that other room we shall find ...the dear women and men and the sweet children we have loved and lost.” –Thomas Monson, April 1990 *Ensign*

One of the unique doctrines restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith is the doctrine of our pre-existence prior to life on earth. I am not aware of any other Christian religion that has retained a similar doctrine, and yet we find such a doctrine taught by many of the early 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century Christian writers such as Origen, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria. This doctrine teaches that we are literal spiritual sons and daughters of God, organized by Him during the long eons before the earth was created. During that

time we were taught of a plan whereby we could choose to become like our Heavenly Father if we were willing to pay the price. The price would be a willingness to be born into a mortal life filled with the possibility of much pain and heartache; into a world where agency would reign supreme. Such agency would enable incredible happiness and goodness on the one hand, as well as unimaginable evil and suffering on the other. The plan required that we would remember nothing of our former existence. Such a forgetting was necessary so that our choices would be truly ours and not coerced by an absolute knowledge of the reality of things. Such conditions are the only conditions under which we could find out who we really are and what we really love.

But we were told that we would not be left utterly alone. A Savior was promised who would love us, teach us, redeem us, and die for us. His life would teach us how to drink the bitter cup of life, without becoming bitter. His teachings and His atoning sacrifice would enable our joys to be sweeter and our sorrows to be more bearable. All who would come to truly know Him would gladly kneel before him and bathe His feet with their loving tears.

Brothers and sisters, to me the evidence is pretty clear that sister Cassidy used her agency to demonstrate who she really was: she was a disciple of Jesus Christ. I know this because in the last few years of her life that I was privileged to know her, her words and actions demonstrated an amazing meekness and willingness to submit to the will of the Lord that mirrors our Redeemer's own meekness and submissiveness to the will of our Father. As I reflect on the life of this sweet lady, I feel that she can answer the Prophet Alma that she had indeed been "spiritually born of God ...[and] received his image in [her] countenance" (Alma 5:14) I know I saw His image in her countenance. What a wonderful legacy of faith and love she has left to all of us.

Her trip through mortality is now over. Ours still lay before us. I pray that we will follow her example and choose the better part: that we will choose to love and serve the Savior.

Of Him I testify. He lives. He is the truth, the way, and the life. He deserves our love, our devotion, and our loyalty. Because of Him, sister Cassidy, and all of us, will one day live again.

Of these things I testify, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, Amen.