

Requiescat in Pace – Virginia Antonette Alhorn

Ephesians 1:3-14

1 Peter 1:13-25

Matthew 25:1-13

As one gets older, things don't work as well as they used to. With some things one can limp along; other things you've just got to admit defeat. Eye sight does not improve with age. It's all about acuity. With age, the lenses of the eyes become less flexible and that makes it difficult to focus on close objects, which is why nearly everyone needs reading glasses in their fifties and up. Acuity; sharpness, keenness of vision; we want to see the world as it is. Up close or far away, seeing what is out there to be seen is an advantage, a pleasure, a goal. I don't have a particularly large house so don't take this the wrong way, but I have a pair of glasses in every room. On the kitchen table, coffee tables, side tables, on the arms of couches, on nightstands and by the sink where I shave, by the phone and on my workbench and by my computer – and there's a simple reason for this: I want to see. A pair of reading glasses is always close to my hands.

Virginia; words of inspiration were always near to her hands. Sweet words, words that kept her heart tender, words that were like sisters, words that lifted her spirit, words that blessed her, words that whispered God's love into her ears. Virginia would harvest these words from multiple resources, carefully placing them where she knew she could access them, words that she treasured, biblical words, songs and poems and words full of life and light. Words of truth and beauty kept the acuity of her spirit sharp. **And she would bring that perspective, that hopefulness in her heart to bear on others.** She wanted to see God's love as it was – full of grace and truth – and so His words were always near to her hands. For Virginia, seeing God as He is was an advantage, a pleasure, a goal.

Like oil in her lamp, God's word animated her heart and kept her spirit flexible. When we become inflexible, we become unhappy on the inside and cranky on the outside. Virginia was most definitely a woman of good cheer. The acuity of her faith was sharpening with age. She wanted to be one of the five wise virgins. Prepared, alert, expectant – **she wanted to be ready to meet the heavenly Bridegroom when He came.** The wise bridesmaids acted as if there was nothing else to live for but this wedding, this procession, the arrival of the bridegroom. They trusted that He would come, but they did not expect that He would show up at a time that was convenient to them. They waited. Oil in their lamps, extra oil in their flasks, they waited. Keeping vigil, content to wait, content to wait in devotion and quiet expectation, wisdom showed itself and was ushered into the wedding feast. Heaven! The banquet of salvation! Life with God... eternally in His presence, a divine home, blessed peace, complete security, abundant life, truth and beauty and music and the glory of God filling the hearts of men, the souls of women. Heaven!

Virginia wanted to be one of the five wise virgins. She knew that Christ Himself was her oil. She sat at His feet in this place and received His tender words, words of His cross and His blood, words of redemption, words that kept her heart alive with hope. She sang! Within the family of a church choir, her voice was lifted in song to the Bridegroom who loved us all, the Savior who was lifted up – high and exalted – on His royal throne, a tree, a cross, an altar. Virginia *was* wise. She knew where her hope was found. The Lord Christ was so generous to her. He

secured abundant forgiveness for her (she knew it). He purchased heaven for her (she knew it). He prepared a place for her and He shepherded her faithfully. Virginia knew it. The good cheer of that woman wasn't simply a façade, wasn't simply an internally driven sense of optimism but it was faith, it was Christian confidence, it was a deep-seated trust because she saw the Lord as He is. Virginia saw in the Lord what was there *to be* seen and it supplied her with a tireless hope.

Like many of you, Virginia was acquainted with loss, sadness. As a young lass, the feminine force in her life was taken to heaven. Virginia's mother Mary died at the age of 42. 20ish, Virginia took the mantle of matriarch. Unexpectedly, her beloved husband fell asleep in Christ. How does a faithful woman of God cope with adversity? Virginia knew this world was broken. Anyone born in 1930 would've seen an abundance of human strife, human cruelty, human angst. How does a faithful woman of God navigate this life? Trust. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6). On the last night of her life in this world, with weighty issues hovering, Virginia gave voice to her deep-seated trust: "God will take care of everything." It wasn't a maudlin sentiment, wasn't a pensive expression. It wasn't merely a plucky Polish piety – it was the product of a life-long trust. Well placed; Virginia knew that her trust was well placed.

Virginia was a teacher. She herself was taught. Love taught her to trust. Love unlike any other captured her heart. The Love of God that is in Christ Jesus beckoned her to trust. Jesus demonstrated His love for her in the most extraordinary way. Death; He came into this world to vanquish death. Sin was the obstacle and the Lord Christ took it all on Himself. "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). That love invaded Virginia's heart and made her spirit soar. She knew that she was loved of God. What is sweeter? That's what makes life bright with color and joy and enthusiasm and an abundant love for others? Christ's cross is love of the highest order and that love claimed Virginia. Christ's love kept her heart tender, appreciative of life, eager to bless others. Virginia coped with adversity because she knew grace – God's unmerited favor, the riches of His forgiveness, and the power of the resurrection.

When I said that Virginia wanted to be one of the five wise virgins it wasn't conjecture – she said as much. In her heart, Virginia knew that this life is preparatory. To be wise is to prepare for His arrival, to prepare for our death. St. Paul wrote this: "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 1:18-20). Virginia saw what was there to be seen. The eyes of her heart were bright with the Love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Virginia saw Him in this life, saw Him through His Word, saw Him in the worshipping assembly serving the least, saw Him at this altar as He Himself gave her His body and blood. The eyes of her heart were enlightened.

What does she see now? What joy ripples through her heart, her mind now? The wise virgins were ushered into the marriage banquet. As the Lord came for Virginia on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, she greeted Him. The acuity of her faith, the enlightened eyes of her heart – all that was past – on December 2<sup>nd</sup> Virginia saw the Lord face to face. What Virginia sees now is the Lord who created her in His image. What Virginia sees now is the Lord who redeemed her by His blood, who loved her to the end (John 13:1). What Virginia sees now is the full beauty of the risen Christ – who washed her in His holiness, who Shepherded her through the valley of the shadow of death and who prepared a place for her in His Father’s house. She sees what is there to be seen: Golden Streets, Gates of Pearl, and the faces of those she loves. That is why we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). He is here to be seen – the eyes of our hearts are enlightened and we treasure the life of our sister. We loved her. She loved us. The wise know that Christ the King loves us all.