Homily for funeral of Lieke Coenegrachts

Fr. Charles Dittmeier (Maryknoll)

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The day Lieke died, I was working on a homily for the 2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time when we had the gospel of the wedding feast of Cana. The more I thought about that gospel and the marriage feast, the more I thought about Lieke and her relationship with God and about the parallels between the ministry of Jesus and Mary and that of Lieke.

Scripture often uses marriage language and marriage imagery to describe the relationship between God and the people of God. The Hebrew scriptures and Christian scriptures speak of the covenant between God and the people of God and of the eternal marriage banquet that is the reward of our faithfulness.

Marriage is one of the strongest bonds that human beings have. We don’t choose our parents, we don’t choose our brothers and sisters.

But in marriage two persons CHOOSE to live in a close relationship, to join together for common life and future.

Lieke was not married. But she made a choice, like a marriage choice, for her God. And Lieke lived out her choice with great love and faith.

As I thought about the gospel of the wedding feast of Cana, I reflected how it might speak to Lieke’s life role as a loving disciple.

Long ago God chose Mary for her role in the plan of our salvation.

Mary lived out her role with great faith, humility, and love. Similarly, In our times, God chose Lieke as his beloved daughter.

God gave her a role in the plan of salvation.

She chose to live out that role, the commitment made in baptism, by sharing her life with her God and her brothers and sisters and building up the reign of God through her efforts.

At Cana Mary was the one who noticed the wine had run out. She directed the servers to do what Jesus told them. In Cambodia Lieke noticed children with no access to schooling, she noticed communities and families limited by lack of water, and she spoke to her institute and to benefactors and to collaborators here saying that together they must do what Jesus wants them to do.

At Cana Jesus filled water jars with water to prepare for a miracle. Lieke filled kindergarten children with knowledge and opportunity to prepare for the fullness of life. At Cana Jesus changed water into wine. Through her water projects Lieke changed arid communities and fields into villages of hope with green paddies to sustain them.

In yesterday’s gospel, Jesus read from Isaiah. He spoke of serving the poor, freeing those held captive in so many ways, giving new vision to those blinded and disabled by injustice and discrimination. And he said that what Isaiah was speaking of was happening in his ministry, in his words and actions.

Through her work in Cambodia, Lieke has helped to fulfill that prophecy of Isaiah also. She made service of the poor her hallmark as it was for Jesus. She worked with Jesus to build up the reign of God today.

The eternal marriage banquet in the scriptures is the goal and reward of those who live out the covenant between God and the People of God.

In today’s gospel, Jesus says “I go to prepare a place for you.” He has prepared a seat for Lieke at the banquet table. Lieke has earned her place in God’s house.

Today we miss her presence, her smile, her being Lieke. But we rejoice that now she enjoys the fullest realization of God’s love for her. And we look forward to the day when we will be united with her in God’s house, at the banquet table, if we follow her example and serve as faithfully as she has.