

I want to tell you about two of my visits with Esther Hanrahan. About a year ago I saw her at the nursing home. It took her a while to figure out who I was. Lately, Esther has not been as sharp as she used to be. When she finally put two and two together, she playfully scolded me. She said, “Oh, yes. You haven’t been over to see me in quite a long time.” I can see her now – sitting on some cloud in heaven – while I’m sitting at my desk in Rome on the day of her funeral in Cameron. I imagine she’s wagging her finger at me with the same message: “You haven’t been over to see me in quite a long time!”

The other visit, though, I remember because it revealed so much about her. This one took place at her home about 2 years ago. First let me tell you, that Esther always made me feel at home over there. It was not the home she lived in for most of her life. She was a farmer’s wife. She raised two boys. She knew her share of hardship. She had more than her share of disappointment and loss. Even though the farm home stayed in the family, Esther gave it up for simpler surroundings. So, her little home in town was not the home she enjoyed for most of her life. But it always *felt* that way to me. When I walked in there, it was as though Esther had this home all her life, and she wanted me to feel at home there as well. She’d talk about her family. She’d ask how things were going with me. We said prayers. We talked about the church. And when it was time for me to go, she kept right on talking. She enjoyed the company – not just because she liked to talk, but because somehow company added to her home.

Anyway, on this particular day, about 2 years ago, I visited Esther at home, and I could tell something was wrong. Eventually she admitted that she had fallen down the night before. And she was embarrassed by the way her arms looked. Honestly, I didn’t notice anything different about her arms. But she did. And she was concerned. She wasn’t concerned about her arms. She was concerned about me. She was concerned that I would be concerned about her. Esther genuinely cared about other people. She felt good about life, in spite of her trials. And her smile and friendliness always managed to lift whatever burdens you once thought you had.

Jesus said to his disciples, “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; and you will find rest for yourselves.” I think Esther learned this lesson from Jesus. He had lightened the burdens she carried in life, and she lightened the burdens of the people who came to know her.

Today we entrust Esther Hanrahan to the care of Christ, who knows her burdens and who, we pray, welcomes her to a lasting home. And knowing Esther, if she looks back today on the suffering she had to endure the past few years, her first words to Jesus are going to be the playful ones she once said to me. “Oh, yes. You haven’t been over to see me in quite a long time.” But of course, he has. It is sometimes hard for us to see Jesus through the suffering we endure. But he is there, placing upon our shoulders the lightest of burdens, and promising us the gift of rest.