

## **Hazel Johnson 1926 - 1996**

### **Homily given at her Funeral Mass by Fr Neil Kelley, curate at the time at St Nicholas Church**

Today is Hazel's doing. A few weeks ago she and I sat in the Hospice in Ealing and talked about today. She chose the readings, the prayers and the hymns.

Over the past few days I have put off the task of sitting down to think what I might say today, because I knew I was faced with such an impossible task. Hazel was a person who had crammed so much into her life and, characteristically, there are so many parts of her life that many of us knew nothing about. So before I say anything let me apologise for missing out what some of you may know about Hazel.

We have found it difficult at St Nick's to say how long Hazel was a member of the family here because it was hard for people to imagine St Nick's without her. She was and is a part of the place and that is a fact of Chiswick life.

Born on 17 May 1926 Hazel led a very happy and full life based in Chiswick. Her working life began in secretarial and administrative jobs, reaching great heights in what she did. There is much of her working life however which we were not to know about. She once mentioned to me 'the Official Secrets Act' and one knew not to ask any more ! But Hazel, the person, we know much about. She was a great lover of cats - she had one herself many years ago. All cats were welcome at Hazel's where she always left a bowl of water out for them. She also enjoyed her regular visits to her embroidery class which met here in Chiswick.

A good friend and confidant to many people, Hazel was always approachable, always available to those who wanted to talk. Her neighbour Marie tells of what a good and reliable friend and neighbour Hazel was; never one to complain even when the going was tough for her, as we know it was, certainly towards the end. Hazel could speak strongly and not pull any punches at times; she spoke as she found. She was her own person who made up her own mind.

It seems as though Hazel was connected with the Church in many ways over the years. She worshipped at one time at St Columba's Church of Scotland Church in Pont Street. She was a member of St Alban's Acton Green, where she was a founder member in 1954 of what is now the Oaks Club. It started as a Youth and Discussion Club; it's still going strong and is mainly for table tennis now. Hazel herself played a good game of table tennis, as well as being a very enthusiastic folk dancer and quite a good actress !

She was a regular communicant on Friday mornings at Christ Church, Turnham Green, and of course she served this parish of St Nick's faithfully, working for about ten years as secretary to the PCC, representing us on the Deanery Synod, a member of the Mothers'

Union, as well as serving on the Pastoral Committee here. Its work is concerned with delivering parcels to those in need at specific times of the year. It was characteristic of Hazel to be concerned for those on the margins, those in particular need.

Many of you will know of her faithful support for the ordination of women over the years. She wanted to be a priest herself. She was passionately committed to this cause and never lost an opportunity to spread the word. However one mustn't dwell on this particular issue because Hazel's life was bigger and broader than any particular party or viewpoint.

She was a person who bore witness to the Gospel right to the end. When she was in Charing Cross, in the Chapel once she heard sobbing. She leant over and held the woman's hand – no words were exchanged. Later the woman came to search her out and explained she had a very serious operation. She said to Hazel, 'I was afraid but I'm not any longer'. Hazel's touch, her concern, her prayers and thoughts for others were with her to the end.

She had a vocation to the single life; her very full and fulfilled existence exemplified friendship, just for the sake of friendship. The family of the Church was important to her, just as her family in the Glebe Community was important to her too. In the last few months many of her friends and neighbours have offered her much love and support just simply because she was a good friend and neighbour to them. This is what she would have done for any of us, and indeed has done for many of us. Thanks must go to all who have looked after her in so many ways in recent months, especially to the staff at Meadow House Hospice. She was always singing their praises.

In recent months she was not able to get to church on a Sunday morning and some of us had the privilege of taking the Sacrament to her at home. There was always a welcome, a cup of tea and a smile. Although, as her neighbour Frances said, Hazel was alert and with-it right till the end it was sad for us to see her becoming frail.

A week ago today here in St Nicholas Church we celebrated the life of St Mary Magdalene. As you know St Mary Magdalene is one of the patrons of this parish, and she was the first to see the Risen Christ when he appeared in the Garden on that first Easter Day. She was the first person to be commissioned to go and spread the Good News of the Risen Christ. She is the apostle to the apostles and many of us would argue that apostolic succession began with her ! I am sure she is praying for Hazel now, as we are, and rejoicing that Hazel's suffering has ended. As we celebrated Mass for St Mary Magdalene a week ago, Liz Crocker led us in prayer for Hazel who was nearing the end of her life. Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> July – the Feast Day of St Mary Magdalene. And so it was that very early in the morning , on the first day of last week, Hazel, like Mary Magdalene, encountered the Risen Christ face to face. After her months of pain and suffering she left this world to go into the Garden, the Garden of Paradise. We can imagine her joy at being

welcomed into the arms of her heavenly Father. We are privileged to glimpse something of that joy and celebration here in this Eucharist.

Hazel, thank you. You have given us all so much love, support and friendship over many years and we will miss you terribly. God bless you. Rest in peace. Amen.