

The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth
Eulogy for Louise Shattles Whitaker
December 2, 2003

We have gathered in this place in the morning of a glorious winter day, not only to proclaim that *The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness, thereof, the world and they that dwell therein*, but, if Jesus was right about what it means to be blessed, to be truly filled with God's joy, then today we come also to celebrate, for the earth also belonged to Louise Shattles Whitaker.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

When Dennis and Donna, Judy and Lisa talked yesterday about Louise, I wrote the word "meek" in the margin of my notes. "She never met someone she didn't like." Louise could find the best in anyone. And this is a gift which comes only from God. When a stranger followed Louise home from the grocery store one day and knocked her in the head and robbed her, over the loud protests of her husband and son, Louise stood ready to forgive.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Louise had a calming presence about her. "When you met her, you felt as if you had known her all your life." It takes a sure

inner confidence and peace to give such a gift, especially to strangers. For *being known* requires openness, honesty, integrity, vulnerability. To make someone instantly at ease in your presence is to share the grace of hospitality, and Louise knew that grace intimately.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

The Shattles family is close-knit. They care about one another. They stand by one They gather for large, festive holiday gatherings, enjoying good eggnog and lots of laughter. Louise was at home in such a family, and created that kind of family in her own children. Loving, caring, faithful to one another. Even to the end. Dennis and Donna, you have learned from a master teacher, and in difficult days, you have sacrificed the comfort of your own lives, to provide for the mother who so provided for you. *Well done, good and faithful servants.*

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Jesus upheld meekness as one of life's great virtues. But his love and his justice were not timid, faint-hearted exercises. And neither was the love, which Louise Whitaker knew so well. I can't imagine anything more difficult than living with an alcoholic

spouse. For in the depths of such a tenacious grip, an otherwise caring person can become callous and cold; an otherwise tender person can be withdrawn or violent. With great regard, for their father whom they loved, but especially for their mother who persevered, Dennis and Donna told me yesterday how she simply refused to leave him. Despite the advice of friends and family. How she simply refused to stop loving him. Such a love takes grit and grace. It is a sign of the presence of God's love among us. Such authentic love is meekness in its rarest, purest form.

Dennis' final word to us yesterday was a simple word of childlike devotion and deep admiration. I can imagine no greater praise of a son for his mother: she was a holy person.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

And so she has.

For the faith and faithfulness of Louise Shattles Whitaker, thanks be to God. Amen.

Graveside Prayer

God of Grace

Who gives life to all;
Who sustains the life of those who believe;
Who is our hope for everlasting life

This day we gather around an open grave
To give thanks for your child and friend
Who know so much about living.

Teach us to number our days
That we might apply our hearts
Also, to the living which Louise
Knew so well.

Ground us in this life, O God
To faithful living
To faithful service
To faith –
Just as she was so grounded,

And give us hope in a love which Jesus taught us,
That transforms:
Despair to hope
Darkness to light
Death to life

In this life, O God, Louise practiced such
Transforming love
And we give thanks today, that in her faith
We claim the promise that she knows
Such resurrection, now, to the full.

Hold her fast in your arms for eternity
And teach us to live as she did.

*Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth,
And they shall even hope for heaven.*