

How good it is to be loved. It is so good to be loved when you are a child... a teenager... a mother... a widow... an aged person... and when you **pass through the valley of the shadow of death**. I'm pretty sure Joyleen was loved by her parents, by her husband, and by her children. But one thing I know for sure. Joyleen was loved by God; from her birth and even before it; from her Baptism on 16th Oct. 1938, until her Confirmation on 9th Nov. 1952. God loved her and was with her through her teens and into her marriage, and through the joys and pains of having and losing children. We are assured in the word of God that **nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ – nothing – nothing in life and death. Surely God's goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, Ps. 23. The love of God never ends**, in this life on earth, and in the life to come in heaven.

We need the love of God so much. On this earth there is so much around us that tries to make us doubt the love of God and take us away from the love of God. Life can be cruel. People can be cruel, and say cruel things to us, which can make us doubt our worth and identity. We need constant reassurance of God's love and grace. Joyleen knew that. She found that reassurance in regular worship, in regularly hearing God's word of love, in regularly receiving Jesus in Holy Communion.

There are so many influences around us that seek to draw us away from God and his love. Jesus says: **the thief comes to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full**. Jesus also says: **the wolf comes to attack and scatter the flock**, and often other people can be that wolf or that thief who try to steal us away from Jesus. In fact most voices in our communities and in the media are like pied pipers who consciously or unconsciously seek to lead us from the God of love, to the things of this passing world. In the midst of it all Jesus says: **I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep**. Jesus loved us so much he stood between the sheep he loved and the wolf who tried to steal and kill us. Jesus was killed to save us, and through his death we are rescued, we are forgiven, we are loved for eternity, and Jesus promises: **they shall never perish and no one can snatch them out of my hand**.

We know that Joyleen has been saved by the Good Shepherd, Jesus, and she will be raised from death to eternal life, where she will live forever in the loving presence of the God she trusted in. But what about you? You, Joyleen's family; You Joyleen's friends; You, Joyleen's sisters and brothers in the Christian family? Do you know the Good Shepherd who loves you, and gave his life for you, and wants you to follow him now, and live with him forever? There are so many voices distracting you from Jesus, and leading you to lesser things that have no eternal value. Today is a day to re-evaluate our lives. Today is a day to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd, who says: **I am the Good Shepherd... I love you so much... I died for... I forgive you... I give you eternal life**. How good to be loved by God. **Amen**.