

Treasures in Heaven

As thunder crashed and lightning flashed, the friends and admirers of Nyleptha Matilda Bryant Shell Roberts, Tennessee's oldest living person who died on May 5 at 112 years old, listened intently as Bro. Rodger McCann spoke about her life as he stood near her casket at Thurman Funeral Home in Sparta, Tenn., Saturday.

Mrs. Roberts had been a resident at Life Care Center of Sparta since she was 107 years old. She was the ninth oldest person in the United States at the time of her death. Matthew Cummings, executive director of the center, said he and the staff "were very honored to have Mrs. Roberts as a part of our lives. She gave so much to our facility, and she gave so much of her life to us. She was a treasure and a joy to be around; it was special to know her, to take care of her, and to have her as a friend."



Nyleptha Roberts celebrated her 112th birthday on March 12.

Bro. McCann referred to Mrs. Roberts as a Tennessee Treasure, a nickname given to her by Life Care, he said. He read from the Bible, Matt. 6:20, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, whether neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal."

"A treasure is something very important, very valuable, to us," Bro. McCann said. "A treasure in this life is corruptible, whether a mansion, which can be destroyed, or whether gold and silver, because there is always the worry about somebody stealing it. We are to lay up treasures for ourselves in heaven. The things we do for the Lord – these are truly treasures."



Niece Carolyn McCann shared a special bond with her aunt.

Treasures in heaven, he said, can be "an encouraging word or smile, a friendly hello. These things are eternal. You can lay up treasures in heaven only by following God, doing what He asks you to do. To have a purpose in life is to be obedient to God and to follow His will. Sis. Roberts laid up many treasures in heaven."

Among them were her prayers for other people. Niece Carolyn McCann reported that she was frequently praying for residents and their family members at Life Care Center of Sparta. One incident she recalled, a few days before her death, was when she was en route

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to see the doctor, and passing the front desk at the nursing center, Mrs. Roberts was told of the need of an associate, and she stopped to pray for her.

Mrs. McCann, and Mrs. Roberts, believe God gave her advance notice of her impending death. "She told me that she was wide awake one evening, and she heard – and remember, she was hard of hearing – a loud voice speaking her name, 'Nyleptha!' She recognized the voice as that of her late husband. She began calling loved ones, and said to her daughter, 'You need to come see me.' When the daughter hesitated, she (Mrs. Roberts) said, 'You never know what may happen.' I believe God was preparing her for the journey home."



Bro. McCann said Mrs. Roberts' love for God and for people was demonstrated daily in the way she knew best. "Sis. Nyleptha prayed this prayer every night before she went to bed: 'Lord, if I have done or said anything today out of Your will, and if I have done or said anything to hurt someone, I pray for Your forgiveness.'"

Can you imagine what our world would be like if every person could pray that prayer, and mean it?

Goodbye, Nyleptha Roberts. And thanks for the memories.

– Beecher Hunter