

## HOMILY

Mass of the Resurrection for  
Sister Joseph Eugene Fogarty, OP  
September 29, 2017

Carol Johannes, OP

Today's readings can hardly be improved upon as selections of the Living Word comforting us as we lay our Sister Joseph Eugene to rest in God's love and care, and also as a wonderfully accurate description of her life as a disciple of Jesus, as a follower of Dominic, as our very dear sister, and as a nurse *par excellence*.

My own friendship with Joseph goes back over sixty years when she was still Mildred Fogarty, a beautiful young woman from San Francisco. When "Our Crowd" were postulants and novices, those who lived at a great distance from Adrian and hence, rarely if ever had company, were often assigned as companions to those of us who lived a little closer when we had family visitors from home. And it was my very good fortune that Mildred, and later Sister Joseph Eugene, was always assigned to my family, who, from the first moment they met her, absolutely loved her, and would have felt deprived if she had not joined us. This was so much the case that when, years later, some of them went on a trip to California, they sought her out for a visit in Santa Cruz.

Though in more recent years, we've had little opportunity to spend time together, earlier on, during my own seven year stint in the West, neither of us ever missed an opportunity for a visit. And in 1956, because Mother Gerald was not bringing sisters all the way from the West Coast to Adrian to make final vows, Joseph and I, and three other sisters in our crowd, made final profession in the chapel of Bishop O'Dowd High School in Oakland, California.

And so it's no wonder that the "Valiant Woman" reading from Proverbs, seems to me to be such an appropriate one for Joseph. Of course, the references to the prudent wife and the householder might put us off a bit. In fact, years ago I heard a homilist refer to this passage as a special reading for Home Economics majors. But scholars tell us it likely has

reference to the description of Lady Wisdom in the Scriptural Book of the same name. And it describes a woman who is solid gold good and wise, generous, warm, kind, gentle and always deeply compassionate toward those in her care, as was Joseph, always. And, lest she seem to sound a little too ethereal, she was also immensely practical and great fun to be with.

Some of her friends have referred to Joseph as “a gentle giant,” because she was so tall and stately and so, so tender toward the sick, the elderly, and any others in need who crossed her path. When we were novices, Sister Marita was a patient at St. Clement’s Infirmary, and she was cared for by Joseph and Sister William Paul, who also was a very good height, and carried herself with lots of dignity and elegance. Sister Marita often referred to her two caregivers affectionately as “Tall Paul” and “Huge Euge!”

As we move to the second reading, Paul reminds us in Romans of something we can’t really hear too often, and something that Joseph knew well: that we were not given the gift of life for our own sake, but rather for the sake of the Lord. In other words, the one and only reason for our existence is to receive the life of our Self-gifting God, to live in and for God, to worship, and love, and share God’s life.

The section from the Last Discourse of Jesus that we read in the Gospel is a passage of comfort and challenge. The Last Discourse has about it a special tenderness because it’s addressed to the intimate disciples of Jesus. At this moment in the narrative they are becoming increasingly troubled because they have heard Jesus prophesy his own passion, as well as the denial of Peter, and finally, the betrayal of Judas. Thus, comfort is in very short supply. Understanding this, Jesus encourages the disciples not “to let their hearts be troubled” but to trust in God and to trust in him. And how often has Jesus not given this same message to us? Haven’t we heard it over and over as we’ve walked our own path of discipleship, sometimes with very troubled hearts? What better advice exists? And who could be a more trustworthy advisor than Jesus?

Then, knowing how traumatic his death and departure would be for them, Jesus assures the Twelve that the reason he’s leaving is to prepare a home for them, and for us,

incidentally. He is utterly inclusive. There's to be room for each and all of them and each and all of us in the heart and dwelling place of God. They know where he is going, he tells them, and he will come back and usher them home.

And here's where Jesus moves a bit from comfort to challenge, because Thomas protests that they do not know where Jesus is going, nor do they know the way. At this it's clear to Jesus that the Twelve have not yet understood the mystery of the unity of Jesus with the God he called Father, and so, once more he patiently identifies himself. "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life," he explains. He is not separate from the Father, so that he has to find a way; he *is* the Way. There is no truth that Jesus has to learn about the Father and then pass on; he *is* Truth itself, and the Father does not possess life apart from Jesus that Jesus will receive in another realm; he *is* Life itself. They now really do know and have seen God in him. (*John Marsh, Saint John*, p. 504).

This is such a solemn moment, but one can't help but wonder about the level of the frustration in Jesus, as Philip (and perhaps the others) remain clueless and ask Jesus to show them the Father because then, at last, they'll be satisfied. He responds, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still don't know me? Whoever has seen me has seen God. How can you ask this question?"

Despite the frustration of Jesus, I find myself wondering if perhaps we should not thank Thomas and Philip, for eliciting from Jesus such a firm, insistent, repetitive assertion reminding us that he is *All*, and he is *ours*, and we are *his* forever. We hear him in the Word, we receive him in sacrament, and we see him in one another.

Most especially, we have seen him in our beloved Sister Joseph Eugene, for whom Jesus has now come to usher her home. She has been, throughout her long and beautiful ministerial life, such a convincing image of Jesus. It strikes me that Jesus might well be saying to each of us here right now, "If you have seen Joseph, you have seen me, and you have seen God."