

# FUNERAL LITURGY FOR SISTER NADINE FOLEY, OP

Saint Catherine Chapel, Adrian Dominican Sisters Motherhouse

May 19, 2017

## HOMILY

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*Come Wisdom, bestow your gifts upon us... We ask for your creative spirit—intelligent, holy unique, firm secure tranquil.*

*We ask for you light—reflecting God, mirroring goodness, widening vision.*

*We ask for your strength—to renew the ancient truths, to honor God's design, to govern all things well.*

*Help us when the work is done to have been friends of God and prophets.*

That was Nadine's prayer for us for our General Chapter of 1992. Nadine loved the Book of Wisdom. The writer of Proverbs and other biblical writers see Wisdom as the creating force that has been there to shape the unfolding universe from the beginning and has continued to shape minds and hearts all through the ages.

As we heard in today's first reading, Wisdom, although one, can do all things. She is called sister, wife, mother, beloved, teacher. She, Wisdom, is seen as the personification of God's presence and activity. And while remaining in herself, she renews all things, and in every generation she passes into holy souls, and makes them Friends of God and Prophets.

As we hear these words describing Wisdom, it is easy to think of Nadine. Nadine's wisdom spirit with its own claim to personal authority is quite evident not only to us her Adrian Dominican Sisters, but to Sisters in other religious Congregations as well as to so many others where she is known for her original work toward women's place in the church and society. She is known and admired for her many writings which exemplify her strength, her courage, her conviction, her single-mindedness in restoring the place of women as Holy Wisdom would ordain it to be.

Nadine's life as a Dominican was modeled on that of Dominic and particularly, as Sr. Mary Jane said last evening, on Catherine of Siena. Nadine devoted much of her energies to draw attention to the relegating and silencing of women in our Church. She, as we know, chaired the Symposium on Women's Ordination in 1975. In her address to LCWR in 1989 she stated: "There is enough scholarly evidence to question some of the longstanding assumptions about the exclusivity of Jesus' call to only male disciples."

She continued to encourage an engagement in the work of retrieval and remembrance so that we all recognize that we do indeed have strong threads connecting us back to the originating story of our faith—and not just through its fathers, but through its mothers and grandmothers and sisters.

One such woman, of course is Mary of Magdala, the often maligned woman, whose rightful place as first disciple has never been acknowledged by our Church. The Gospel reading we just heard which Nadine wants us to pray with today is about this Mary, recalled here as follower of Jesus, as disciple, as one who ministers and as preacher of good news.

The Gospel tells us of Mary's bravery and persistence. While it was still night she walked out by herself into the dark streets of Jerusalem despite the danger—being a woman, walking alone, being connected with this Jesus whom they just crucified. Still, Mary had to take the risk.

Jesus had already called her as one of his disciples. He had called her by name, *Mary*. She had followed him, she was with him on Calvary and now she was determined that she was going to his tomb.

When she found the tomb empty she began to ask questions: "Where is Jesus?" "Where have they taken him?" And totally determined, she kept asking her questions and asking her questions until Jesus called her by name again, *Mary*. She knew his voice instantly. And then Jesus commissioned her to go and tell the news that he had risen.

But as Nadine herself said in a reflection on this Scripture passage, "While Mary might have wanted to rest in her re-discovery of Jesus, this was not to be. She was sent by Jesus in mission to the disciples, to bear the message of the redemption to them. She, a woman, was sent with an apostolic mission."

*Are we surprised Nadine chose this reading?*

Nadine has written much on Catherine of Siena, who said to God, "I'm only a woman, surely, I'm not meant to play such a public role!" And God's answer to Catherine, like an echo of what was said to Mary of Nazareth at the Incarnation: "All things are possible to me. Go, do the work I have entrusted to you. I will be with you." With that encouragement ringing in her ears, Catherine went forth.

So did Nadine. She believed in being summoned to express our charism of preaching, she saw us as called to be peacemakers and reconcilers, to share our charism with others, our Associates, our co-workers, our families, our friends, the whole world. Her constant prayer, reflected so aptly in the hymn she asked us to sing today, "*What do you want of me, Lord? Where do you want me to serve you? Where can I sing your praises?*"

And sing God's praises she surely did. Her life was an example of our commitment to study, contemplation and action. Her strong belief that women have something unique to offer in their teaching and preaching resulted in her later years in her commitment to researching and writing the history of our Sisters from 1924 to 1961.

Remembering Nadine for me is both joyful and sorrowful. Joyful because in my much earlier years I, with Sisters Sharon Weber, Linda Bevilacqua, and Donna Markham—as we told you last evening, had the privilege of serving with her on our General Council from 1986-1992. Nothing we were faced with was ever too great or too small to be considered, discussed and acted upon with great love.

What I remember most about Nadine was her lack of pretension and her attentive listening. Her genuine presence and deep trust were always there. And while she was never very elaborate in her praise we always knew that constant challenge to us who worked directly with her, as well as to the Congregation, was the same challenge of our Dominican sister Catherine of Siena: *"Be all that you can be and you will set the world on fire."*

And remembering Nadine is sorrowful, because I/we have lost a dear friend.

I recently read an article by an Irish author. She quoted Samuel Taylor Coleridge, an English poet, who wrote "friendship is a sheltering tree," one that shelters and protects during the stormy and sunny periods of life. As we all know, a true friend is one of God's greatest gifts to us—one who helps us through our times of suffering and times of sorrow and one who enhances our times of joy and celebration. And from Sirach we read, "Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter; whoever finds one finds a treasure."

As we heard last evening and as we look around this chapel it is clear that Nadine developed many, many faithful friends. Her wish always, I believe, is that each of us develop in ourselves our deep capacity for true, loyal, reliable, kind and generous and faithful friendship so that with God's help we can be the *sheltering tree* and true friend in so many ways to those most in need of someone who cares about them.

I have always considered Nadine as Lady Wisdom, a true treasure, and even though she was of our time, I think of her as one of our great foremothers, one who knew us so thoroughly as Dominican Sisters of Adrian, one who challenged and supported and trusted and even if somewhat reluctant to express it aloud. She loved each one of us with her entire heart. At our Gathering in 1989 she prayed, *"May we together be a force for inflaming the earth with the breath of the Gospel truth and the refreshing water of redemption."* I know we can count on her even more now in her eternal glory to help all of us be that force to inflame the earth with the breath of the Gospel truth.

And so today in the words of the hymn which I believe we will sing later: "O loving God, we send your daughter, our beloved sister Nadine home to you..." where I feel sure the choirs of angels will immediately add her to their number to sing your praises in her deep contralto voice which *we* will never forget.