

Funeral homily for Mary Marchese

Doris Kearns Goodwin is an eminent American historian and the author of several critically acclaimed works. Several years ago, I read her autobiography, "Same Time next Year", in which she recalls a significant moment from her childhood. It was the day of her older sister's graduation from nursing School and Doris was in attendance. She was profoundly moved by the ceremony.

She writes,

"The ceremony was beautiful. About sixty students marched in a solemn line toward the stage, lighted candles in hand. The glow from the candles cast a strange and wonderful light on their faces. "Why are they carrying candles?" I whispered in a loud voice to my mother. She explained that the candles were in honor of Florence Nightingale, the founder of the nursing profession, who carried a burning candle as she tended to the wounded soldiers in a makeshift military hospital during the Crimean war, earning herself the name "Lady with the Lamp."

A Christian is a bearer of light, of grace. And the light she bears is Christ, who identified himself as "the Light that has come into the world". In his justly famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches his disciples that they are "the Light of the world".

"Light" is an important metaphor in Sacred Scripture. God dwells in "inaccessible light" Jesus Christ is "God from God, light from light" (creed) Light is one of the images of heaven.

Light is one of the mysteries of the natural world and the supernatural life of grace.

In his writings, Saint Paul exhorts his fellow Christians to put on the armor of light. In his letter to the Christians at Ephesus, insists that they "live as children of the light for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth".

Light is, in addition, an image of heaven. Jesus assures us "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Mt. 13:43)."

Saint Thomas Aquinas is of the opinion that the bodies of the Blessed in heaven will shine seven times brighter than the sun. In eternity, the Blessed shine like the stars.

Mary was a nurse for over forty years. She labored in a place of light and darkness, St. Mary's Hospital. Inasmuch as she lived in God's light, she was able to bring comfort, consolation and peace to many of her patients.

As one who has been a patient in one of our local hospitals many times, I can speak with conviction and a sense of deep gratitude. Nurses have played such an important role in my healing. In addition, they each prepare dying patients for death and life promised us on the other shore.

Not only was Mary a dedicated nurse, she was also a devoted wife, loving mother and a faithful member of Saint William's Church in her lifetime.

It is my fervent prayer that perpetual light shine on our beloved Mary, and that at a time known only to God, we are all re-united with her in heaven.