Funeral Homily for Donna Mae Kadrlik
February 7, 2014

This gathering of the Christian community for the funeral of Donna Mae Kadrlik invites us to do three things. We need to grieve. We need to give thanks. We need to commend a loved one to the unfathomable mystery of God’s love—a love that is the giver and the source of life—yes, even everlasting life.

First to grieve! For twelve years Donna Mae was with us singing and directing sung prayer as we gathered to nurture and celebrate who we are with each other and before our God. Practice after practice, Sunday after Sunday, wedding after wedding, funeral after funeral we experienced her ministry to our community. Time and again I heard her sing:

“May the angels lead you into paradise.
May the martyrs come and welcome you....”

These sung words of faith and trust in God filled this church touching the hearts and minds of grieving people—bewildered by the immensity of loss and what appears to be the finality of death. There is nothing so heavy for any of us to face than the death of a loved one—not to mention our own death. Most of us are tempted to run away into something easier to think about or talk about or do! Just keeping busy helps—but it is not the answer.

We must grieve! As difficult and painful as it is, we must grieve! Donna Mae knew this! Someone once told me that the degree any of us allow ourselves to grieve is the degree that we really engage the living of our own lives. Someone could have easily said to her:
“Good grief, Donna Mae.
Isn’t it enough that you ask us to sing with you at funeral after funeral;
 isn’t it enough that you speak words of remembrance and faith
 at your own parents’ funerals;
but then isn’t it a bit too much when you become a spiritual director
to groups of grieving children who have lost a sister or brother,
a mother or father? Good grief, Donna Mae,
when is the intensity going to end!”

She kept going!

Remember this past children’s Halloween Mass on October 31st?
That afternoon Donna Mae got out of her sick bed, dressed up as a witch
and came in a very weakened condition with her cane in one hand
and she used her other hand to stabilize herself as she moved down the aisle
grasping the end of each pew as she moved.
She was greeting the children. She wasn’t about to let her ravaged health
get in the way of her joining the party with the children.
Ghosts, goblins, spooks, yes and even cancer, were all going to be laughed at.
Nothing was going to stop the children and her
from joining the saints when they go marching in!
As Donna Mae’s body was going down, something was buoying her up.
It was amazing to see!

And so in the mist of this terrible grief there is a terrible beauty!
For this we give thanks! Look at this family who in the mist of their deep grief
have said to us:
Thank you so much for everything to you have given us
and please take Donna Mae’s love and spirit with you wherever you go!
Believe in the power of love, believe in the goodness of God
and believe in the strength in yourself.
Look at Ron, a devoted husband who loved and cared for his wife and the adult children through these terrible days. They are all here—knowing the goodness of life in the mist of death. God is with them as God is for and with their beloved Donna Mae.

Look at this church gathered in prayer! Look at these people of all different ages and sizes and diverse music groups doing different types of music—remembering their director urging them to not just sing the words and notes, but to feel them and pray them! My brother & sisters in the Risen Lord, there was a lot more going on here than Donna Mae Kadrlik wanting things done this way or that way. The one Spirit of God moves among us. That same Spirit energized our music director and energized all of you who gave God the gift of musical worship. That same spirit of God is with us in our grief and will bring each of us and all of us to a new beginning and new life within our community. But we, like Donna Mae, must trust and cooperate where the Spirit will lead us!

We walk by faith and not by just the sight of our physical eyes. There is so much more going on among us than just what our eyes can see. Donna Mae was a living witness among us to seeing with the eyes of faith.

So we commend our beloved Donna Mae to the One who is our way, who is the truth about ourselves and who is the source of our life. Donna Mae died at age 51. Jesus died at age 30. Donna Mae was on a terrible roller-coaster ride with a terrible disease—loving her life, living it every day. Feeling vulnerable and frightened, angry and sad; receiving love and support from her family, among her many friends, and the many medical professionals joining her in the fight to preserve the place she dwelt in among us for 51 years.
Jesus too embraced his life with us to the fullest. He too was faced with the terror of what it is to be fully human and enter fully into one’s own death. His death frightened those close to him. His death would also be grieved.

But he lived his human life knowing that come what may, no matter how confusing or absurd, his Father’s love could be trusted even as he gave up his last breath and presented his human life fully into his Father’s hands. As terrible as Good Friday was, Jesus was buoyed up by the Spirit of God strengthening him. The Spirit too strengthened Donna Mae as her body became more and more uninhabitable and she passed from us into God’s hands. As she was facing her impending death she likely recalled what she heard many times at all those funerals. I am speaking of the words of our second scripture that the family chose for our hearing today. St. Paul asks the rhetorical question:

Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.

O God, our heavenly Father, we thank you for the many gifts and the witness of your love that you have given us, in the life of Donna Mae. As you lovingly received your Son, Jesus, into your hands, we now commend to your care the life of our sister in Christ—Donna Mae. We can imagine her among your heavenly choirs and if you need recommendations from us for a director, we have a suggestion!