

Funeral Homily for Filomena Marino Capobianco

I. Introduction

A. First, a word of sympathy and love to Filomena's family as we commend her to the Lord of life and love. Tears of mourning, tears of longing for one so loved as she well up in our hearts but do not cloud the vision of faith so central to her life. So to Filomena's sons and daughters, Caterina, Lucia, Pasquale, Anna-Maria, John - and your spouses - and to Filomena's 28 grandchildren and 39 great-grandchildren, a host of nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends - my sympathy, love, and prayers.

B. And these are not merely my sentiments. With us today is just about the every priest in the Archdiocese of Washington. With them I am joined to you in solidarity of faith, hope, and love. And we are joined by Filomena's fellow parishioners here at St. John's. It would be an understatement to say she was a long-standing member of this parish. If ever a parish had a pillar, it was Filomena. It was here at St. John's that she and Pat (Pasquale), her beloved husband nurtured their faith, the faith in which they formed their family . . . I think of Filomena's friendship with Father Mordino, whom she loved like a son, and with whom she is also united in God's eternity. His priestly love played a pivotal role in her life and in the life of you, her family. Filomena was also part of another family of faith, the Sunday TV Mass at the Shrine a ministry which extends the Eucharistic liturgy to the sick and homebound. Often we priests use phrases like "family of faith" to describe their parishes - but thanks to your dear mother and father, now reunited in eternity - you truly are a family of faith - a very big family of faith.

II. John 11:21-27

A. Appropriately, we read from the Gospel of John the Evangelist. In this passage Jesus arrives at Bethany to find that his friend Lazarus had died. His sisters Mary and Martha are in mourning & Jesus himself also wept for his friend. Yet there is an air of hope, expectation, even insistence, in Martha's words to Jesus: ". . . but even

now”, that is, three days after my brother’s death “I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.” When Jesus says, “Your brother will rise,” Martha is not satisfied. “I know he will rise,” she says, “at the resurrection on the last day.”

B. So, Jesus proceeds to probe Martha’s already solid faith. Mere faith in the resurrection on the last day wasn’t good enough for Martha and, indeed, it wasn’t good enough for Jesus. Martha was looking for a miracle here and now, and Jesus was looking for faith in himself as the Resurrection and the Life, for faith in himself as the source of unending life even in those who die. The hinge on which this Gospel story turns is Martha’s response: “I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God . . .” That is to say, Martha’s faith was maturing right before Jesus’ eyes and ours.

C. Perhaps in her final hours, Filomena had a similar dialogue with Jesus. Hers was a bedrock faith that shaped her whole way of life yet in the final and difficult hours, she would ask about the meaning of her suffering; she would ask about the pain and sorrow of departing from this world, She did so, not the way a faithless or angry person would ask but rather as one who, like Martha, was a friend of Jesus and a woman of deep faith. In her final dialogue with the Lord, we can hear an echo of the Lord’s own words, “I am the Resurrection and Life. Do you believe this?” And believe she did. For throughout her life she consumed the Body of Christ broken to make us whole and the blood of Christ poured out for the forgiveness of sins. She could say with St. Irenaeus of Lyon that because we partake of the Eucharist even the body, grown old and infirm, “possesses the hope of the resurrection”.

III. Living at Home and Away from Home

A. Faith in the Jesus, the Resurrection and the life, faith in Jesus who lives and intercedes for us and for his Church – this was the cornerstone on which Filomena and Pasquale built their home. It was not a large home physically but it was greatly enlarged by family, faith, hospitality, and love. More than once, when I read about Mary and Martha in the Gospels, it struck me that Filomena combined the virtues of Mary and Martha. She prayed like Mary and attended to the details of hospitality like Martha. How many of us in this church today have sat at her table and have taken part in *la cuncina della nonna* . . . there’s nothing better on earth! How many

of us in this church have been the subject of her prayers . . . not only the prayers she offered as a daily communicant but also the prayers she offered for her family and all of us in the privacy of her home. Her home was an extension of her parish and she was among those who made her parish church a home.

B. Because her home was built on the cornerstone of faith, she recognized clearly how fragile and fleeting life in this world can be. Again and again she witnessed this in the death of loved ones and in the real-life drama of raising and caring for a large family. St. Paul in our second reading refers to our earthly dwelling as a tent and Paul, himself a tent-maker, knew something about tents. He knew they provided only temporary shelter and that they are prone to collapse in stormy weather.

C. Sensing this fragility, Filomena taught her family – and by extension those of us who are part of her adopted family – not only to take care of ourselves and not only to make good and prudent decisions, but even more so, to anchor our lives in the solid foundations of faith – so that we could face life courageously and look beyond appearances with the eyes of faith, as St. Paul teaches. In her love for her family and for all of us, she was not afraid to speak her mind and to tell the truth, especially when she thought we were doing anything less than “aspiring to please the Lord” in this life in preparation for the next. So, we may say that she lived in this passing world with her heart set on the world to come – and by word and example, she taught us to do the same.

IV. Remembrance and Prayer

A. Just as Filomena would be standing at the door of her home to welcome her family and her extended family, so too, she now stands at the doorway of her eternal home. She is standing there waiting for us – lovingly and tenderly – waiting for that day when we too will enter the doorway of eternity. As she awaits us, she is praying for us and for our own safe passage as we journey toward our heavenly home. No longer will she welcome us with an earthly banquet but will desire nothing more than to see us seated at the Paschal Banquet of Heaven.

B. And we, for our part, can still give something to her. I have no doubt that, in her lifetime, Filomena prayed many a soul into heaven and probably emptied out

Purgatory with some regularity. How she would appreciate our prayers for her own safe passage – having Masses offered on her behalf and interceding for her as we pray in private. In eternity she knows us and loves us more fully than before. Let us know and love her also in a new way, not as a mere memory but as one whom the Lord has taken to himself.

Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, may her great and loving soul know eternal rest and the fullness of joy!