

In Memory of Sr. Mary Felix McKenna, SA

~ Excerpts from the Homily of Fr. Jim Gardiner, SA ~

Funeral Mass of AUGUST 6, 2012 - Monday



Birth: March 16, 1923 ◆ **Entered our Congregation:** September 14, 1936 ◆
First Profession: June 28, 1944 ◆ **Final Vows:** August 27, 1949 ◆ **Death:** August 2, 2012

“The ‘rule’ - if we might call it that - is that the homily not only follows the Gospel, but is also supposed to be based on it. I’m afraid I have to break that rule because, when I got the word on Thursday morning that Mary Felix had died peacefully just a few hours earlier at The Residence, I had a flashback that I have to share: ‘It was a good number of years ago - 20, maybe more - and I’m not exactly sure anymore of the occasion; it might have been 1993 (*the year Sister was Grand Marshall of the Peekskill St. Patrick’s Day Parade*), or another year around that time when Sister was being honored as “*Woman of the Year*” by some organization; whatever it was, there was a fine dinner and the place was packed. After the meal, the evening’s formalities began when it was Mary Felix’s turn to be introduced, she proceeded to go - table by table - in the place, introducing many friends ... most of them, but not all, she knew by name. She got to one table and cheerily announced, “I don’t think I know anyone at *that* table!” Then moved on to the next table of ‘friends’ where she asked one guest, “*What is your name again, dear?*” No one in the room took any offense, it was all in good fun - good *craic* as the Irish would say. About the only anxious moment came when we looked at the printed program and there was to be a song at the end of the evening. We were afraid that, at the rate things were going, it’d have to be, “Morning has Broken” ... *BUT* ... back to the readings & homily...

“We’ve heard these readings before, so often ... that we might *not* hear them; or, we might think that whoever chose them wasn’t very creative. But when the deceased select readings, as Mary Felix did ... we need to hear them as a sort of final gift - something she wanted us to hear one more time. Wisdom’s words about ‘grace and mercy,’ Paul’s words about things, ‘yet unseen’ and the Lord’s words about ‘knowing why.’

“But if we were to go back and re-read those familiar texts ... something else starts to emerge in each one of them. Buried deep inside Wisdom’s seven verses ... is a reminder of the radical peace that awaits those who pass thru the gates of death; in Paul’s second letter to his

beloved Corinthians, there’s his antidote to daily discouragement ... and there’s Jesus’ invitation to stay close, no matter what, because for us, ‘He and He’ alone is and must continue to be: way, truth & life. We constantly need to hear these texts.

“Mary Felix had great friends ... she met them in so many different venues: hospital corridors, buses to NJ, Washington, rosary boat rides on the Hudson, and in rides in cars of *former* strangers. She seemed to be always ‘on the go.’ It’s not that she didn’t rest, she didn’t rest in public Earlier this year, Timothy Radcliffe, former Master General of the Dominicans, published a book called, Taking the Plunge: Living Baptism and Confirmation and in it, says something that could serve as Mary Felix’s epitaph:

‘Moping in the present, as if it were just an antechamber to real life, is no preparation for eternity.’ (p. 179)

If what he writes is true, then the busyness for which Mary Felix was famous (according to some) or infamous (according to others) was a preparation for what she is now experiencing on the other side of the gates of death. Despite the fact that Radcliffe is British by birth, and Dominican by choice, not everyone after all, can be Irish and Franciscan. Gerald O’Collins, the Australian Jesuit ... recently published, Believing in the Resurrection: The Meaning and Promise of the Risen Jesus. In the introduction of that book, he quotes what he calls “the radiant lines of Rabindránath Tagoré,” an early 20th century Bengali poet ... “Death is not extinguishing the light; it is putting out the lamp because the dawn has come.”

So, even though we may be a little skittish about taking Mary Felix to a place of *rest*, tempting though it may be, we can take comfort from the fact that for her, and for all who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith, the DAWN has come! AMEN.”