

FUNERAL SERMON FOR SR. ROSALIA CAULFIELD, CDP,

written by her friend, Father Charles Yost. Father Yost, himself, was ill. He died this past July; this is the homily he would have given for the funeral of his friend.

Readings Isaiah 25:6-9 Romans 5:5-11 Psalm 27:1,4,7-9,13-14 Matthew 11:25-30

The prophet Isaiah's vision foresees the final victory of the Lord-God over all enemies, and portrays the establishment of God's kingdom as a celebratory banquet on Mount Zion, which is a symbol of Heaven. God is the host. The faithful are gathered around God's throne. The prophet announces that God "will destroy death forever." The prophet then tells that the response of the people will be, "Let us rejoice and be glad that [the Lord] has saved us!" The reading does not promise resurrection. Hebrew thought at the time was still somewhat nebulous. However, the prophet does promise an end to death and the consolation of all who mourn. Implicit is life after death. It is entirely consonant with the hopes of those who believe in the resurrection in that "the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all places." Later Israelite theological development would be more precise: "the souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them" (Wisdom 3:1).

The response from Psalm 27 is most proper. This psalm is prayer of confidence in God. Our verses express that confidence well. It is the experience of all that we have some anxiety about death; maybe a degree of curiosity is a better way to put it. We all express concern for those who have gone before us. For people of faith this is normal. The language of Psalm 27 is reassuring; the vocabulary of the opening verse is powerful: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom do I fear? The Lord is my life's refuge; of whom am I afraid?" We boldly petition "to dwell in the Lord's house all the days of [our] life" (v. 4b). This can mean in the present life; it can also mean forever in eternal life expressed in this way, "to gaze on the Lord's beauty" (v. 4c). This is our prayer for all the faithful departed.

Today it is our prayer for Sister Rosalia Caulfield, a loving handmaid of the Lord, daughter of Divine Providence; and my longtime friend of more than 50 years.

More assurance is found in The Letter to the Romans. We all profess hope in God. The basis of our virtuous hope is the goodness of God, whose love is "poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit." Sister Rosalia for more than 70 years of committed Religious Life is proof of a virtuous hope in the promises of God. It was the experience of the Hebrew people, and it certainly is our experience that God was and is kind and merciful, compassionate and loving. To live a faithful religious life for more than 70 years is testimony to that truth. It takes a sense of humor to live religious life. The retreat director of my first retreat as a high school seminarian repeated many times over five days. "never lose a sense of humor" in religious life. I know that Sr. Rosalia had a sense of humor. To teach first graders and college nursing students, to nurse the sick, young and old, to spend compassionate time with dying cancer patients, is most noble work that requires a lot of love. I once asked Sr. Rosalia, "How does one teach first graders? Her reply was, "You don't, you just love them." That was a lesson I appreciated when I began to celebrate Mass for school children. Instead of trying to preach to them, I let them ask me questions, and it was a learning experience. Children are wonderful teachers.

In recent changing times in our world and in the Church and in Religious Life a sense of humor is an absolute necessity.

From these texts: Isaiah, Psalm 27 and from The Letter to the Romans we should all take comfort and be reassured of God's saving love.

Our gospel passage includes a prayer, addressing God with both the intimate language of fatherhood and the exalted title, "Lord of heaven and earth." It is God's will that the "little ones," those lacking social standing and religious expertise, are the object of God's special care. The wisdom which God reveals is the intimate knowledge that Jesus possesses of his Father. However, Jesus invites us to learn his wisdom, telling us that he can reveal the Father to us. The invitation is gentle and reassuring: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke

upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves."

In the more than fifty years I have known Sister Rosalia, she has pursued, in her religious life, this wisdom offered by Jesus, by the simple beauty of her childlike character. Sister Rosalia was a wise and gracious handmaid in her loving service of God and the many to whom she ministered: in classrooms, in hospital rooms and corridors, in her availability in pastoral ministry, in her religious obligations, and most especially in friendship. Through it all she has found God's 'yoke easy and his burden light.'

It is a good and holy thing to remember the dead, as we today remember Sister Rosalia in our prayers. We grieve at a loss, but with the knowledge that the loss is but temporary. Jesus was no stranger to this. He wept at the tomb of his friend, Lazarus, and the bystanders said: "See how he loved him." Today we grieve, and we pray, and that is our expression of love.

The way out of grief is through it, and we get through by actively taking up our cross. Metaphorically, we do that by continuing our efforts at fidelity to our vocational call. Sr. Rosalia's steadfastness in religious life is a boost to our hope. Her faith in and love of God is known to us.

Today we petition our steadfast, compassionate and loving God to receive Sr. Rosalia into life in his eternal kingdom, to the dwelling place that he has prepared for her in the company of Jesus Christ whose victory over death is our salvation. Our gathering today to celebrate Sr. Rosalia's life is our way of sharing in the transformation and transfiguration of one whom we have known and loved. God has given us a part to play, through prayer, in the dawning of eternal light and life for Sr. Rosalia.

May she rest in peace!