

Homily that was given at Sr. Rose Anastasia's funeral mass by her dear friend

Fr. John Andrew Connell

Homily delivered at the Mass of Christian Burial of Sister Rose Anastasia, OP

Born into eternal life, January 24, 2011.

Like Peter, James and John on Mt. Tabor, we can exclaim it is good for us to be here to celebrate a life, well lived deeply and lovingly.

It is good to gather and thank God for the Gift that God shared with us in the person of Sister Rose Anastasia for over 97 years.

As members of her religious community, as members of her family (nieces, grandnieces and grandnephews and even great grand nieces and nephews, as friends and colleagues of Sister Rose in her various ministries, in chorus, we say thank you, God for this wonderful woman of faith, whose deepest human desire was to live in Christ Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, all the days of her life.

I believe we gain a deeper insight into the life of Sister Rose and the spirituality that she lived, in and through the readings that she has chosen for her Mass of Christian Burial.

The Lucan Gospel just proclaimed tells of a young maiden, perhaps 13-15 years of age, who is confronted by an incredible mystery... God's choice of her to bear the world's Savior, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Mary is stunned by Gabriel's appearance and the message that he bears.

In her full humanity, Mary questions, "How can this be"? Indeed, we can say fairly that Mary "wrestles" with this message from the Holy One.

Graciously a sign is given to her, that of her kinswoman Elizabeth, though advanced in years, is with child, already in her sixth month. Further Mary is assured that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and the One born will be the Holy One of Israel, for nothing is impossible with God. How long Mary wrestled with this invitation and how long it took for Mary to respond, we do not know. St. Luke telescopes her response to an immediate one. Yet

with the deepest trust, Mary of Nazareth makes her response to this Inscrutable God, “let it be done as you say”.

I believe Marion Elizabeth Geeraerts pondered this Annunciation scene deeply in her teenage years, for she, too, was wrestling with an invitation from God, to give her life to God’s Beloved, Jesus ,in and through her consecrated life. Her obstacle was her father’s disapproval. I believe Marion’s inspiration was Mary of the Annunciation to whom she prayed for strength, courage and deep trust.

As Sister Rose Anastasia would say fondly, with a certain smile, I eloped into the convent, leaving a note for her father on the kitchen table asking her father to understand that she needed to pursue her deepest desire. And the rest of her life is found in the annals of the Sparkill Dominicans and also etched in the hearts of all who knew her.

Sister Rose chose a section of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, Chapter 3, 14-21 entitled in the Jerusalem translation, Paul’s Prayer and I would like to suggest it is Rose’s Prayer. Paul and she pray that through the graciousness of God, acting through the Holy Spirit that we would have the power to live from our truest self. In so doing, living our lives in the deepest union with Christ Jesus, we would learn the breath and length and depth of God’s love and then come to know the utter fullness of God. Having known Sister Rose Anastasia for over forty years, I believe that was her holy desire, a desire she lived and strove to deepen every day.

Sister Rose Anastasia went home to God on Monday, January 24th, the feast of St. Frances De Sales. St. Francis espoused the life of gentleness and devotion. How appropriate Sister Rose ended her Baptismal Journey into God on that day! When I consider the long life of Sister Rose these words come readily to mind: real, warmth, devotion and adventuresome. I came to know Sister Rose professionally as school counselors on Long Island. I experienced her warmth in the wonderful smile. Several years later at a wedding of a mutual friend I invited her to dance with me. On the dance floor while others were talking about many things, our conversation was on prayer and the initiative that the De Le Salle Christian Brothers of the LINE province were planning. It was determined that it would be a mixed community of men and women who would come together to deepen our

prayer life. Sister Rose's smile expanded as she listened. She responded by saying I know three other sisters who would be very interested besides me. Sister Rose was absolutely correct and not too long after that Sister Enda Marie Kennedy, Sister Rita Veronica Shea, Sister Catherine Mary Gorman and Sister Rose became part of the House of Prayer that began at Salve Regina College in Newport, Rhode Island. That was Sister Rose's first adventure with the De La Salle Christian Brothers. Several years later she journeyed to New Jersey to join Hopestead, that had evolved from that summer House of Prayer. From those experiences her love for Spiritual Direction, the At Home Retreat and her accompanying others on their spiritual journey grew stronger.

In 1979, at the age of 67 Sister Rose Anastasia answered a need in the community and became a principal for the first time at St. Gregory's in Garnerville, N.Y. Foolhardy? No ! Courageous? Yes and very trusting in God in whom nothing is impossible!

The last reading chosen by Sister Rose is from the Book of Wisdom. The sacred writer states that the souls of the just are in the hand of God. Those who trust in God shall understand truth and the faithful shall abide in love. Indeed Sister Rose is now abiding with her God, with her parents, Susan and Frank, with her sisters, Frances and Shirley and all her sisters who have walked with her in their consecrated lives and with a whole multitude for whom she ministered on this side of life.

We thank God for the love and light, for the truth, the warmth and devotion that went out from Sister Rose Anastasia and touched us all so deeply. We honor her best by striving in our lives to manifest to others the virtues that she lived so gently and lovingly. As we sit here let us listen to a contemporary expression of the Magnificat, entitled "Behold". Let us behold our beloved Rose Anastasia in her new life which eyes have not seen or ears heard, the life of utter fullness in her God.

Father John Andrew Connell