

**Eileen Patricia Nolan**  
**Pontifical Mass of Christian Burial**

St. Peter's Church, Capitol Hill, Washington

16 December 2017

Archbishop J. Augustine Di Noia, OP

*Wisdom 3:1-9 / 1 John 3:1-2 / Matthew 11:25-30*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ. In his loving providence God took Eileen to himself on Tuesday of the First Week of Advent this year. And now just as the nine days of solemn preparation for Christmas Day are about to begin tomorrow, her family and friends gather in this Pontifical Mass of Christian Burial to commend her soul to his mercy. "See what love the Father has bestowed on us:" in this moment of sorrow and loss, God turns our minds and hearts to the coming mysteries of the Incarnation always close to Eileen's heart.

For Eileen loved Christmas. Some of my fondest memories of her—and I suspect this is true for many of you as well—revolve around Christmastide. On a snowy Friday night now well over twenty years ago Eileen and I found ourselves stuck in a snow drift somewhere on the New Hampshire turnpike traveling to Kennebunkport, Maine for the enchanting Christmas prelude weekend that we both loved. She calmly said a prayer, and we were soon on our way again. We all have warm memories of her Seward Square apartment decorated for Christmas. Christmas at the Dominican House of Studies, Christmas with her beloved family, Christmas with dear Father O'Sullivan and her St. Peter's friends: these were times that filled Eileen's heart with joy.

I can still hear her saying to me: "Fr. Di Noia, you know love comes down from heaven at Christmas." And what is Christmas about if not the great act of divine love that we call the Incarnation? The only begotten Son of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, became incarnate in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary so that the Father, who loves us more than we can imagine, might give us a share in the life of the Blessed Trinity. "See what love the Father has bestowed on

us.” The Son of God became a son of man so that we the sons and daughters of man could become the children of God. “Beloved, we are God’s children now” (1 John 3:2). “O amazing goodness!” wrote St. Augustine, “he was born the only Son, yet would not remain so; but grudged not to admit joint heirs to his inheritance” (*Tractatus on John*, ii. 13). According to the Venerable Bede, “the grace of our creator is so great that he has allowed us both to know him and to love him, and moreover to love him as children love a wonderful father” (*Commentary On 1 John, in loc.*).

This was Eileen’s faith, as it is ours. “Beloved, we are God’s children now,” we read in the first letter of John. There follow the most extraordinary lines in the Scriptures about the life to come: “What we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). If she has not already, Eileen will soon see the fulfillment of this promise with her own eyes.

When Father Charles Farrell was elected prior of the Dominican House of Studies in 1981, he showed the wisdom of an experienced superior when he said to me, his subprior at the time: “We have to do something about the food.” He wanted to replace the mediocre food service company that we had inherited, and somehow God led him to the Nolan’s Capitol Hill wine and cheese shop. It was love at first sight. Eileen came to the Dominican House as Director of Food Services for the next twenty nine years. Her own early life as a Dominican sister of the Congregation of Our Lady of the Rosary made her a perfect fit. This former Sparkill Dominican understood and loved the Dominican Order. She had the Dominican spirit in her heart. She was one of us. Yes, she was a consummate food service professional but she did it all with a Dominican flare.

In many ways, this characteristic Dominican sensibility—a firm acknowledgment of the beauty of created things and a recognition of the importance of material things like good food—is rooted in our faith in the Incarnation. The Son of God became a son of man, he took on human flesh,

human existence, becoming like us in all things but sin. This Christmas faith was the source of the energy behind Eileen's enthusiastic guidance of the St. Patrick's Day celebration here at St. Peter's as much as her dedicated and loving service to the friars at the Dominican House of Studies over the years. In retrospect, there can be little doubt that Eileen's service contributed to the continuity and stability of the community and the faculty at the Dominican House of Studies during those critical years of development.

"The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; and their passing away was thought an affliction and their going forth from us, utter destruction. But they are at peace" (*Wisdom 3:1*). Eileen's last years were difficult, a time of moving with Christ from Bethlehem to Golgotha as we all eventually must. I remember visiting her while she was recovering some years back in a nursing home in Maryland. Her legs had worn out after all those years of working in the kitchen, but she was always preternaturally cheerful, more interested in talking about me than about her aches and pains.

Eileen's wonderful and devoted family accompanied her in the final journey. For beyond Calvary, we pass with the risen Christ into the life to come where she is now at peace. According to an ancient Christian writer, "those who have merited to be numbered among the saints shine like the nighttime stars of this creation" (*Cassiodorus, On the Psalms*). Now Eileen will enjoy that fullness of life that Christ made possible by coming to us at Christmas. "Come to me," Christ says to her and to all of us, "all you who labor and are heavy 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (*Matthew 25:30*). Eileen will celebrate this Christmas in heaven.