

FUNERAL MASS

SR. GERMAINE BEVANS, OSB

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Abbey Church, St. Leo Abbey
Tuesday, February 16, 2010



P. Sullivan
26 - XII - 95

Sometimes there are very few external markers, which indicate the level of one's faith. An atheist can behave little different than a believer; a Muslim can behave little different than a Jewish person. Life in a secular society seldom allows one an opportunity of a reliable marker of a person's faith. However, death can be a defining moment. The behavior, the calm or disquiet, the level of acceptance or rejection can offer a genuine window into a person's soul and their belief. The same can often be said of the family or community, which surrounds the dying or the deceased. My experience has often been that endless weeping and/or near hysteria can but may not always be an indication of one's faith and belief in the life which is to come, the resurrection, and obviously Jesus, as the way, the truth and the life.

If there is indeed something of truth to which I speak and death and the deceased embrace of it and death and the reaction of those left behind can be a reliable marker, then our Sister Germaine and

those of us gathered here this morning passed the test. Did she want to die when initially told of her cancer, not really? She wanted to live as long as her father (101 years) with more time for her family, her religious family and for others. But she knew that what was a possibility was slowly becoming a probability and she prepared herself with her usual calm to accept its inevitability and embrace its reality. She told me on Sunday that she spent her life preparing for this moment and she was ready. No tears, little regret if any, a profound love for those she would leave behind and a final request for "our bishop" as she would always refer to me. The peace and equanimity of her passing is worth a few moments of our time and reflection.

Our Sister Germaine was a woman of the Church and of the scriptures. She believed the words of Isaiah "**he will destroy death forever**". Saved by the Lord Jesus, we would be gathered together some day and the tears from all our faces would be wiped away. She knew that life with God would be superior to even a life well lived and full of happiness in this life. Her heart was not troubled by what was to come and she knew in the words of the Gospel that soon He "**would come back again and take [her] to himself so that where [he] is, [she] would also be.**" Who here can dispute that our Sister Germaine devoted her whole adult life to serving "**the way, the truth, the life. No one comes to the Father except through [Jesus].**" With what little strength she could muster to speak on Sunday she told me she looked forward to seeing Jesus – in the flesh and the blood. There were no tears, just a longing.

Our Sister Germaine could not and would not allow her to be separated from the love of Christ. She believed the words of Paul that "**death, nor life. . . .nor present things [like her cancer] would be able to separate us from the love of Christ.**" For fifty-four years she was intimately bound up in the love of Christ, serving Christ in religious life as a teacher, a principal, a prioress, a spokeswoman for religious in a largely male world. What she may have lacked in size she made up in wisdom and perseverance. She was a woman of near indomitable inner strength based on a profound faith.

Our Sister Germaine loved the Church even as on occasion she may have felt hurt by the Church. She never stopped loving, forgiving, calling to greater justice. Our Sister Germaine and another laywoman in this diocese were members of a priests support group. She loved priests and was ready to forgive those who acted at least in her mind unjustly on occasion. She was a perfect Vicar for Religious for she was gifted interiorly to speak the truth in love. When I saw her on Sunday, she dismissed her wonderful and loving family and had one last moment with "our bishop." I shall not soon forget the main purpose of our farewell visit as she said, "Bishop, will you promise me that Sister Marlene will take my place as Vicar. She loves religious." Talk about being lobbied right up to the end! Before Sister Marlene feints, I slid off the question by saying, "Germaine, you are my Vicar for Religious until Jesus comes for you" to which she responded, "you are not answering my question." Persistent, dogged, deeply committed, a woman of faith. She reminded me on that occasion and at other times of the Gospel image of the widow and the judge.

She loved her Benedictine family. I was surprised when she chose to live in Pinellas County after becoming Vicar for Religious. She told me of the sacrifice she would need to make to accept the position. She loved the Rule of Benedict and the example of Scholastica. One of my associates was asked by our Sister Germaine to check her cell phone recently. He did and returned it to her, allowing it to safely drop onto her desk. She challenged him as to why he was so "rough" with the phone and the next day brought him a copy of the section of the Rule of Benedict which said "Treat everything as if it were a sacred vessel of the altar." (RB: 31:10) Having the young man in check-mate she smiled at him, thanked him and resumed her work. Work, prayer, hospitality, these Benedictine charisms were an integral part of her life.

Allow me then to conclude where I began. To our Sister Germaine's family, we extend our sympathy and our gratitude. Thank you for sharing your sister with us and for coming to her side for her transition

from this life into the next. A tear for the hole in your heart is appropriate, but you know she is where she always wanted to be. To her religious family at Holy Name Monastery, your colleague is now a part of the Church Triumphant, showing us in these days the genuine believer's way to approach one's death. She is once again at peace now. Thank you too for sharing her with us. She would not wish us to weep long for her absence from our lives but to get on with the task of preparing ourselves for that day when every tear will be wiped away.