**A Homily in Celebration of the Life of Mary Edwards**

**Isaiah 61:1-3, Psalm 121, 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:9, John 14:1-6**

**Church of the Redeemer, Bethesda, Maryland February 5, 2024 David Schlafer**

1. ***Opera Singer*--what other words come spontaneously to mind when you hear THOSE two?**

**I am not well acquainted with opera, so I have to confess**

**that the first two descriptors that pop into my head are DIVA and DRAMA QUEEN.**

**Someone who, with soaring notes and elaborate gesture takes center stage—**

**sucking up all the oxygen in the room, whether it’s a concert hall or a living room.**

**Someone who is larger than life—and tends to make life difficult for others.**

**That is a caricature, of course; but it serves as a point of stark contrast:**

**Opera Singer as Diva and Drama Queen—THAT is what Mary Edwards has NEVER been.**

**Indeed, it’s everything of which Mary has been the complete antithesis.**

**Lively—yes, music lover—yes, passionate—yes. Ostentatious?—NEVER.**

**In all the times I have been in her presence, Mary has been essentially in the background.**

**Not invisible, not shy or awkward—she’s been like a framework shaper, a context setter,**

**a thoughtful, spirited conversation convener and catalyst.**

**One who artfully, seemingly effortlessly, draws everyone**

**into what is significant, what is at stake, what is the heart of the matter.**

**And Mary has done all this without drawing attention to herself.**

1. **Mary has invested herself in many other vocations also.**

**Opera Singer Mary also has an impressive array of other credentials and achievements**

**as a Chef, a Photographer, a Family Therapist, a Mediating Social Worker:**

* **Chef—preparing lavish culinary works of art**

**nourishing and delighting gatherings large and small.**

* **Photographer—helping those who see her pictures see the world better or differently.**

**But she herself BEHIND those pictures, as it were, not a featured SUBJECT IN them.**

* **Family Therapist—listening intently to people**

**who are talking past or at cross purposes with each other;**

**hoping against hope that in and through such unproductive talking,**

**mutual listening, and healing, healthy hearing will, over time, emerge.**

* **Social Worker—battling bureaucracies and boundaries—**

**all for the health and wellbeing of those systemically shunted or cast to social margins.**

**Concentrating energy specifically in working with legal structures**

**to foster reconciling and restorative justice, not generic, punitive justice.**

1. **In all of these vocations, I hear rich variations on a recurring melody line, do you?**

**But let’s note still one more vocation, the vocation that was, for Mary, most important:**

**Lover of Tilden and Lover of God.**

* **Love as sitting alongside in passionate silence**
* **Love as devoting continuing creative and practical attention**

**to finding, making, and solidifying close and enduring connections.**

* **Love as finding self-identity in the sharing of self unreservedly.**
* **Love as a liturgy celebrating beauty in its manifest forms, with gratitude to their Givers.**

**Mary has been an embodied instance of St. Francis’s “instrument of God’s peace,”**

**Who, in giving, has received; and, who in receiving, has re-doubled her giving.**

1. **The texts of Scripture that serve for us as transmitters and transposers of Sacred Tradition—**

**these, today, resonate deeply and richly with Mary’s life**

**whose loss we grieve, yet for whom we are so grateful.**

**As was true for her predecessor, the prophet we name Isaiah,**

***The spirit of the Lord has been upon Mary,***

***anointing her to bring good news to those oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted,***

***to proclaim to those bound, liberty and release--to comfort those who mourn.***

**We tend to think of prophets as something akin to opera singers—big booming voices.**

**But Mary has modeled for us another kind of prophet singer;**

**one whose passion for justice, reconciliation, and conditions for communal celebration**

**have been imparted and effected with steady, gentle strength.**

1. **That quiet, powerful strength, has come from Mary’s deep confidence**

**in a God who, as the Psalmist sings, has *not let her foot be moved.***

**who has *watched over HER goings out and comings in.***

**The trust with which she has inspired us, has been grounded in her sure and certain belief**

**that, come what may, the Creator of Heaven and Earth will “have her back.”**

1. **Her witness to the promise that no matter what,**

***all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well—.***

**the unrelenting witness she has borne is indicative of the fact**

**that she has been able to grasp what Jesus, before his crucifixion,**

**tried to convey his disciples—that the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life**

**has prepared many dwelling places for all of us.**

1. **On this day, when we give thanks for Mary’s life, I am particularly taken**

**with St. Paul’s deliberate willingness to live in this present life,**

**paying full attention to its textures and tensions—not seeking to escape them;**

**but seeking to understand them *sub specie aternitatis—*in the context of Life Everlasting—**

**where life as we know it now has come from,**

**and where God has promised that our life is headed.**

**No one ever accused St. Paul of being economical with his use of language—**

**of saying in few words what he could go on and on about instead.**

**But wait—every once in a while, he sends up a dazzling firework phrase—listen:**

***We wish not to be unclothed, but further clothed, so that what is mortal is swallowed up by life.***

**What? What was THAT again? *So that what is mortal may be swallowed up—by LIFE!***

**Mortal though Mary has been, as are we all—in the life we’ve known and shared with her,**

**Mary has envisioned and practiced what Life grounded in the Everlasting Love of God must be,**

**the Life that fully enfolds her now.**

***All of us go down to the dust,* our Commendation Liturgy reminds us.**

***BUT,* glimpsing however partially through Mary what God intends for all of us;**

***even at the grave we make our song,* as clearly, as strongly as our voices can:**

***Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.***