



Eulogy of Sister Kathleen M. O'Sullivan, BVM (Donall)
Marian Hall Chapel, Sept. 25, 2018

Good morning and welcome to the celebration of life of our Sister Kathleen O'Sullivan.

Kathleen Mary O'Sullivan entered this world on May 13, 1928, in San Francisco, Calif. Her parents Daniel and Katherine Murphy O'Sullivan were both born in County Cork, Ireland. A younger sister, Sheila, completed the family.

Kathleen attended Most Holy Redeemer GS and St. Paul HS in San Francisco. While studying scripture during her teenage years, she found the verse, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." "I was struck, even though I didn't know what the kingdom was," Kathleen said in an interview. "I remember Easter morning, singing at Mass 'Know Thy Redeemer.' I thought, how do I respond to this? I admired the teachers I had, and I decided then that I would be a nun." She entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1946, received the name Donall upon her reception on March 19, 1947, professed first vows on March 19, 1949, and lived 72 years as a BVM.

Kathleen served in elementary education for 21 years. She was missioned as a teacher at St. Bridget and St. Cornelius in Chicago; St. Ann in Butte, Mont.; St. Paul and St. Thomas Moore in San Francisco; St. Anthony in Missoula, Mont; and Holy Cross in Kauai, Hawaii; where she also served as principal. One of her favorite missions was teaching second graders at St. Ann in Butte. "They had this self-assurance and freedom, a sense that could rise to any occasion," Kathleen recalled. "I remember the first hunting season; the dads would take their sons hunting. The teachers would make out assignments for them. I thought it was wonderful. It wasn't this romantic, frontier independence idea, but it was somehow different, and I liked it." She also fell in love the town itself for the "openness and unpretentiousness of the people."

Changes in the Catholic Church and the congregation during the 1960s deeply affected Kathleen. "The Scriptures became challenging," she commented. "They became real to people." Given the opportunity to select her ministry, she decided to work as a teacher at the St. Joseph Religious Education Center and as a pastoral assistant at Holy Spirit Parish, both in Butte. Later, she would also work as the religion education coordinator for St. Joseph ES in Missoula, Mont. While serving in Butte, Kathleen eventually became the volunteer coordinator at the newly opened Highland Hospice, where she recruited and trained additional volunteers.

When the St. Joseph religious education center closed, Kathleen found additional income by selling World Book encyclopedias. She viewed this as one of her greatest learning experiences. "I became a great deal more assertive. I proved to myself that I could do something entirely different and be successful at it." This prepared her to step in as the chairperson of the Butte Community Union, a coalition of low-income people working together to change unjust systems. She also obtained a righteous anger. "I began to realize the injustice of so many things," she commented. "Everybody steps on the one below to raise themselves. Injustice gives you a certain energy." She learned quickly that low-income people often are not taken seriously, but nuns are. Thus began her life as an activist empowering people to influence decisions that affect them.

Through her many years of dedicated service, Kathleen established Safe Space, a refuge for battered women, and volunteered with Habitat for Humanity, Montana Community Shares, TAPS (Taking Action for Peaceful Solutions) to protest the first Iraq war, and Caring for Creation Network to raise awareness of global warming. She served on the national advisory committee of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. She also participated in the Spirit, Commerce and Sustainability Conference, which explored the connection between religious beliefs regarding stewardship of the earth and the management of businesses and households. Writing for the Diocese of Helena newspaper and the BVM Center News, she provided activities and tips to help ordinary people live a more earth friendly lifestyle.

St. Paul wrote, "If I speak in human and angelic tongues . . . If I have all faith so as to move mountains . . . If I hand my body over . . . but do not have love, I am nothing . . . I gain nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:). Kathleen called her work as an activist the "most difficult and most fulfilling." She was not sent to find a quick fix to the injustices she encountered. Rather, she was called to enter deeply into personal lives; she was summoned to love. "Unless you come in contact with someone who is suffering or oppressed, it doesn't become real for you," she commented. "I've begun to understand that this is what the Gospel is about. This what Jesus talked about when he spoke about all those marginalized people, 'What you do to them you do to me.'" One pastor remarked, "Her whole journey of faith has been moving in [the] direction of living the Scriptures . . . She has done it wonderful ways."

In *The Montana Catholic* article honoring Kathleen's 60th jubilee, the reporter noted, "Kathleen has an appreciation for beauty and a zeal to make a difference in the world." Kathleen commented that joining the Sisters of Charity was one of the best decisions she had ever made. "It has been a happy, productive, centered life, and that has everything to do with God."

When Kathleen moved from Missoula to Mount Carmel, the Blessed Trinity Catholic Community sent her off with a beautiful blessing prayer. We pray the same blessing today.

"We pray God's blessing over our friend, our sister [Kathleen] as she goes forth from our community to her [heavenly] home. Her vision of justice and peace for all God's children inspires and motivates us. Her joy and sacred spirit transforms us. [Kathleen,] may you rejoice in the calmness of God's Spirit leading you to your desired haven, giving thanks for God's kindness and wondrous deeds. Amen."