



Eulogy of Sister Eliza Kenney, BVM
Marian Hall Chapel, Dec. 13, 2018

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Eliza Kenney.

Elizabeth Rose Kenney was born on Sept. 23, 1932, in Phoenix, Ariz., the only child of Robert and Jean Lobingier Kenney. Her father, who was born in New York State, restored furniture for a living and was hired by a railroad shipping company to repair furniture damaged in transit. Her mother, originally from Pennsylvania, upholstered furniture and loved to create seasonal displays at home and at the antique store that the Kenneys owned and operated together. They were artisans and very independent. Her father was 74 when the couple decided to build a house by themselves in the mountains.

God bestowed upon Eliza musical and artistic talents that she very generously shared though the years. She and her good friend, Mary Alma Sullivan, created songs we treasure: *The Journey* and *Let Us Sing, Alleluia* for our 175th Jubilee, *Let Us Be Grateful*, and *The Quest* which we will sing today.

In 2007, Eliza assumed the role of Motherhouse curator just as the renovations were nearing completion. It was a natural fit for one who had grown up living with artisans. She shared, “[The Motherhouse] was essentially an enormous blank canvas. A time of challenge and opportunity.... Artworks enliven the visual environment and provide opportunities for conversation. Working with the art is very gratifying -- even the tedious tasks of cleaning, repairing, and reframing.” Over the years, the responsibilities of the curator expanded to include the placement of art throughout the Mount Carmel campus as well as floral arrangements and seasonal decorations for the Heritage Rooms. Just days before her death, Eliza placed the Advent wreath outside the Motherhouse foyer and decorated the Heritage Room fireplaces.

Eliza’s love of music developed in third grade at St. Francis Xavier ES while taking piano lessons with SM Floriana Malloy. After graduating from Xavier HS, Eliza attended Mount St. Mary College in Los Angeles on a scholarship for two years before pursuing her vocation to the religious life. She later earned a bachelor’s degree in music from Clarke College and a master’s degree in music history and literature from the University of Minnesota -- her specialty was medieval, renaissance and 20th century music history and literature.

Eliza entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1951, and was received on March 19, 1952. She professed first vows on March 19, 1954, and lived 67 years as a BVM. Her first mission was to Our Lady of Peace HS in Saint Paul, Minn., where she taught piano, organ, chorus, band and glee club.

In 1963, she joined the faculty at Mundelein College as a music instructor and later chaired the music department. A former student and coworker wrote, “Eliza ... has a love and enthusiasm for music that shapes her teaching. She is knowledgeable, prepared, organized, innovative, fair, and has a good rapport with students. She can . . . adapt her methods to relate to both beginners and highly trained students....She has shaped the music program at Mundelein according to national standards, and has been innovative in introducing new techniques of teaching and learning”

In 1975, with money raised from bake sales and donations, Eliza and Sister Fran Dolan, BVM, also a music instructor at Mundelein, purchased a build-it-yourself harpsicord kit. However, they did not begin the project for almost a year after a well-meaning helper who unpacked the box untied all the marked bundles and disposed of all the labels. "We were too scared to even start," Eliza confessed. Yet, after three years of precision measuring, sawing, drilling, sanding, gluing, nailing, and bloody fingers from stretching the 180 wire strings, the instrument was built. The five-octave concert Flemish harpsicord played beautifully, despite Eliza and Frances having a half dozen wooden pieces left over with no idea where they belonged!

When Mundelein became part of Loyola University in 1991, the university hired Eliza to establish Loyola's first music department. After the approval of a music concentration within the fine arts major, the Mundelein music program found a new home in the Loyola curriculum. Eliza served as chair and program director of the music department until retiring in 2006. In 2003, she was nominated for the Sujack Award for Teaching Excellence in the College of Arts and Sciences at Loyola. The nominating student wrote, "Sister Eliza is the unifying factor that makes the music program at Loyola what it is. Her passion for music is evident in her teaching as she brings to life the power of music in her students. The music program at Loyola is unique [and,] under Sister Eliza, [it] thrives."

Eliza was fascinated with how people learned. "I enjoy watching the creativity of each student emerge in totally different ways," she remarked. "[When] students experience the comprehensive heartbeat of music . . . the thrill in their faces is incredible." She believed that music enabled students to come to a greater understanding of themselves reflecting, "[Music] touches students' souls in ways they don't often experience."

While Eliza loved playing the piano and going to concerts and the symphony, she also enjoyed driving and spending summers seeing the countryside. She was a dedicated walker – she and her dear friend, Judith Dewell "hit the bricks" daily, no matter the weather. Though Eliza valued privacy, she never failed to greet others with kindness and her broad smile. She was a woman who continued to grow in grace and beauty through the years -- a calm and quiet presence. It was how she lived and it was how she died.

In recent years as memory issues developed, Eliza began a long and challenging journey for both herself and those who loved her. This Advent, Jesus gave Eliza an early Christmas present – heaven itself -- "My peace is my gift to you, [Eliza]" (John 14:27). We find comfort that her music and her spirit remain with us and continue to bless us. With the hope, love and joy of the season, we celebrate Eliza, confident that she continues to play beautiful music before God.