

Mass of Resurrection for Sophie Cieslak Maida

Saturday, 2nd February 2008

Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church

Scott Township, Pennsylvania

[Pittsburgh Bishop David Zubik](#) opened the service with a welcome and expression of condolences to the Maida family: “We stand with you at this tender moment. We offer our prayers for your mother and your family.”

+++++

Funeral Homily by Cardinal Adam Maida

Cardinal Maida began his homily by reading a letter of condolence to him and his family from [Pope Benedict XVI](#). The cardinal then offered his “heartfelt thanks and greetings to all those in church... to all those who have offered their words of comfort and prayers... to those who have sent flowers” Cardinal Maida added, “We have truly felt your love. Thank you for being with us.”

He shared how appreciative he was to have his friends Cardinals Szoka and McCarrick there... to Bishop Zubik and all the bishops in attendance... and to all the priests, who took the time and made the effort to be there: “All of you gathered together have made a significant impact on us,” Cardinal Maida said. He expressed his personal gratitude to the pastor of Our Lady of Grace, Fr. (Richard) Infante and the parish staff.

+++++

“As we gather together to celebrate this funeral liturgy for my mother, we give thanks to God for the gift of her life. But in this context, in this moment, what was special about her that we can remember? How could we characterize her legacy? What about her inspired you to be here today?

“I would like to suggest that it was the fact that she was a faithful woman, a woman of great faith. For many people in the world, life has no meaning beyond the experience of this world. What can we see? What can we hear? What can we touch? What can we experience? What can we accomplish through our human

efforts? How much wealth can we accumulate? But to other people, God has given the gift of faith. Our faith introduces us to a totally different reality—another world—beyond this world in which we live.

“Through our faith, we come to know God as our Father, a God who is kind, merciful, and good; a God who so loved us that He created us in His own image and likeness and placed us on this beautiful planet. But our faith teaches us that man and woman sinned and so God sent His Son to save us, to redeem us, to show us the way we should follow to arrive at the kingdom of eternal life and to enjoy the eternal banquet. Through Christ, God sent His Spirit to strengthen us, to enlighten us, to console us, to guide us on life’s journey. In faith, we proclaim in the Creed, we believe that Christ died, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. That’s what faith tells us.

“My mother was a believer and she lived these realities and believed in the promises which come from her faith. This is the abiding faith that sustained her through trials and tribulations, many hopes and joys. Among these were her early childhood, born of Polish immigrants... in a poor town of dirt roads, where they got around by horse and carriage; a mother who stood with her children and watched as our family home was washed down the river during the Johnstown Flood; who struggled to survive the Depression; who lost her husband early in life; and finally ‘old age’—homebound for 6 years, dependent on others, but always grateful for the assistance, and especially from the sisters who cared for her daily. Despite these trials, my mother also experienced many hopes and joys as well: a happy marriage and family life, 3 sons, two of whom became priests and one who married, three grandsons, 8 great grandchildren, blessed with many friends. She remained true to her God, to her Church and to her family and friends.

“As part of this faith, she took comfort from our Blessed Mother, who remained close to her Son throughout His ministry. It was this strong faith of our Blessed Lady that gave her the courage to accompany Jesus in His ministry and to stand beneath the cross on Good Friday. In short, the Blessed Mother was the ultimate mother, focused on Christ her Son from birth through death, trusting in God’s promises of eternal life and the eternal banquet.

“My mother had a strong belief in the resurrection, and more importantly, in eternal life and this allowed her to experience in this life an intimacy with God in prayer. She spent numerous hours in prayer every day (six rosaries—she had her schedule), enjoying a conversation with her God, which can never be broken in eternal life. I am reminded of a comment once made by John Cardinal Dearden. He said, ‘when I die, I don’t want God to say to me *who are you?* Rather, I would hope God would say to me, *John, good to see you. I’ve been waiting for you. Come, enjoy your reward.*’ I suspect that God is welcoming his daughter, my

mother, with open arms and the conversations they had in this life now continue in eternal life.

“The Gospel reading from St. John challenges us to see beyond the present and look to the future. Martha and Mary were sad because their brother Lazarus had died. Jesus consoles them and asks them to look beyond this life—it is only transitory. What is important is eternal life.

“On the day of my mother’s death, we celebrated Mass for the sick and the dying. Because of her condition, she was unable to receive the Eucharist. But shortly after Mass, God called her home. Instead of my mother coming to the Lord to share in the Eucharist at our altar, the Lord came to her and invited her to the eternal banquet. We were saying the rosary at her bedside when she took her last breath. Remarkably, the moment came as we began the second decade of the Glorious Mysteries— the Ascension!

“The hymns that we are singing this day highlight our belief in new life with God: The strife is over. God’s amazing grace has saved us. The bread of life nourishes us. God raises us up on eagle’s wings. This is why we gather to celebrate the life of my mother. Of course we are sad. We mourn our loss. But our faith strengthens us to proclaim with Mary: ‘my spirit rejoices in God my savior.’

“On this day, we ask the intercession of our Lady to accompany our mother to her eternal home and we ask Jesus in his love and mercy to open the gates of paradise to the banquet of life which he has prepared for my mother and all the deceased. Amen.”

+++++

Following the homily, after Cardinal Maida sat down, his brother and concelebrant, Fr. Ted Maida, reached over and gave him an assuring squeeze on the arm.