

+ Funeral Homily – Mrs. Frances (“FRAN”) Powell +
~ March 9th 2010 – St. Martha’s Parish Family, Uniondale ~

Joining with Father Gregory, a long-time member of St. Martha’s Parish Family, and Msgr. Ralph Sommer, the pastor of the adjacent Parish Family of St. Brigid’s, and all here today, we offer the condolences of St. Martha’s Parish Family to Fran’s devoted children – Kathleen, Eileen, Barbara, and Bob, and to her sister, Elizabeth. The community is also here to console Fran’s 10 grandchildren: Patrick, Robbie, Joey, Mary Rose, Jackie, Eddie, Kristen, Bobby, Janet, and Matt, along with Jeannie & Patti, Mary, Gerard, Ginny and many other nieces and nephews, in addition to Fran’s 14 great-grandchildren – indeed all the extended Powell and McCue Families.

At every funeral Mass two of the principal symbols are the Easter Candle and the Pall, the large white cloth covering the casket. Both symbols recall Fran Powell’s Baptism some 98 years ago at St. Michael’s Church on 34th Street in Manhattan. Fran received ashes on Ash Wednesday, three weeks ago, but Easter came 4 weeks early! Today her casket sits in the shadow of the Paschal Light – the Light of the Resurrected Christ – claiming her forever into the Kingdom of heaven.

The Pall that rests on top of Fran’s casket also recalls her baptism when she was “*clothed*” with and by and for Christ. But this *particular* Pall *isn’t* the one that’s ordinarily used here. It’s different, and it’s only going to be used for this Mass. It was made by Fran’s daughter, Kathleen, just for today and it will follow Fran to Holy Rood after the Mass.

Fran’s favorite hobby – which she devoted so much of her time to – was sewing. She knitted sweaters and baby clothes for all her children and the grandchildren. She made dresses for her daughters and other family members. She repaired altar linen’s for church as an original member of the Rosary Altar Society. She made “Angel” costumes over the course of many years for the Christmas plays here at St. Martha’s.

This pall is made up of *leftover material* of dresses and clothes that Fran “*created*” over the years. It’s a beautiful *symbol* of her life. The cross and the “alpha and omega” are literally the extra material from completed dresses. Sewn into this pall are Fran’s name, and many symbols that summarize her creations: the tape measure, scissors, thread, and sewing needles. There’s even an image of a slot machine because Fran liked to go on pilgrimage to Atlantic City. She even placed a bet now and then for Father John Byrne, the founding pastor.

In the first reading for this Mass that Sister Eileen read, the author speaks of the “worthy woman and mother” “who is always busy, and who does her work with eager hands. “*With all her family clothed,*” the author says: “*her children stand up to proclaim her blessed.*”

That’s what this Mass of Resurrection is all about as we gather around the Easter Candle and our prayers rise like incense before the throne of God. This white cloth symbolizes how Fran Powell literally and spiritually “*clothed*” her own life; her family; and her community – with the Light of Christ. Yes, in the words of Proverbs: “*her children proclaim her blessed;*” plus, her grandchildren *declare*; her friends *affirm*; and her parish family *states publicly* – that she was “*a blessed woman,*” and we were all blessed to have known her!

In the Gospel we just heard, *after* Jesus multiplies the loaves and the fishes, (and after he feeds all the people and “all were satisfied”) they gather together the “leftovers and the fragments” which filled many baskets. We can assume that the people eventually consumed the leftovers and the fragments.

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But soon, even the leftovers were gone! Likewise, this white pall will be consumed into the tomb of Fran Powell. What's "leftover" for her family and her family of faith is the witness, the memories, the example of giving – and forgiving – that Fran Powell multiplied many times over during these 98 years.

Although Fran wasn't a great cook according to her own daughters (!), she was a weaver, a seamstress, a sewer of love – pulling together the two principle threads of faith and family, and multiplying her talent of "clothing" her family and friends with love and prayer!

And that's the message that I'd like to offer – especially to the 10 grandchildren – as you live your lives, and pass on the values of faith and family that you've received from your grandmother. You have had the *presence and example* of your grandmother longer than many other grandkids. Now it's your opportunity (and your challenge) to take the *leftover memories* and multiply them in your own lives. She *knew* where to draw her strength from – the Eucharist, from prayer and Mass each week, and from the family – which she *knitted* together. The best way to honor your grandmother's life and memory is to "go and do the same."

The other message, I'd like to offer is to Fran's children and to Fran's community of faith here in Uniondale. In the second reading that Barbara read St. John reminds us that: "we are ALL God's children. No matter what our age or state is in life, we remain children, God's children!

That's a very appropriate scripture text for Fran Powell. Because, in her later years, you, her children, took care of your mom perhaps longer than she took care of you when you were children! After your dad died some 60 years ago she picked up the fragments and went about the business of family and faith. And you have marvelously witnessed what faith and family is all about in your outstanding care and devotion to her. She gave you quantity – and you gave her quality! She gave you a great witness – and you have given us a great example. She fed you with love – and you multiplied that many times over. She made clothes for you – and you wrapped her with devotion. She taught you that you were God's children – and you lived as a beloved son and beloved daughters!

And so, through the Powell Family St. Martha's can affirm the words of St. John: "see what love the Father has bestowed upon us" in the witness: not only of Fran – but also in the gracious and generous and faithful *reciprocity* of her children. That's the *example that you give to us* – which we will try to multiply in our parish family (as your children and your nieces and nephews also "go to do the same.")

Finally, the third message for all of us is Eucharist – thanksgiving for this long and faith-filled life – that God has blessed us with for 98 years. Woven into this liturgy is the deep *gratitude* for the faith in the Resurrection of Jesus that assures us all that "when the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven."

Msgr. Frank Caldwell