

MY SOUL PROCLAIMS  
THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD

EULOGY FOR

**MARY LEE BEDFORD**

(January 9, 1938 - October 8, 2013)

OCTOBER 11, 2013

ST. PATRICK'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

9511 4TH AVENUE

BAY RIDGE, BROOKLYN, NY

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## MY SOUL PROCLAIMS THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD

I

[MARY LEE KNEW HOW HARD IT WAS TO KEEP ME ON SCHEDULE. SO I HOPE SHE FORGIVES US IF WE KEEP HER WITH US JUST A BIT LONGER.]

GOOD MORNING TO ALL OF YOU.

FATHERS ANDRE AND DENNIS, AND TO ALL OF YOU GATHERED HERE TODAY WITH THE COMMON PURPOSE OF PAYING OUR LOVING RESPECTS TO A REMARKABLE WONDERFUL WOMAN;

I AM SURE WE ALL AGREE THAT IT IS DIFFICULT TO FIND WORDS THAT DO JUSTICE TO MARY LEE COLLINS BEDFORD.

I THOUGHT HARD ABOUT WHAT TO SAY THIS MORNING SINCE THE SHOCKING NEWS OF MARY LEE'S UNEXPECTED PASSING TUESDAY.

UPON REFLECTION AND SOME PRAYER I BELIEVE IT IS APPROPRIATE TO BEGIN WITH THE ACCOUNT FROM SCRIPTURE ABOUT THE ANGEL GABRIEL'S VISIT TO THE BLESSED MOTHER.

THE ANGEL GABRIEL ANNOUNCED THAT SHE WOULD BEAR A CHILD THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. THE BLESSED MOTHER ANSWERED: "MY SOUL PROCLAIMS THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD".

NOT, "ARE YOU KIDDING ME?"

NOT, “WHY ME?”

NOT, “FOGGETABOUTIT?”

NO. SHE SAID “MY SOUL PROCLAIMS THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD.”

WITH THOSE WORDS SHE SET THE STANDARD FOR ALL PEOPLE WHO COMMIT THEMSELVES TO A HIGHER PURPOSE AND DEDICATE THEIR LIVES TO OTHERS SO THAT ALL MAY LIVE AGAIN.

WELL, EVERYTHING WE KNOW ABOUT OUR MODERN DAY MARY, MARY LEE- EVERYTHING THAT HAS BEEN SAID THESE LAST FEW DAYS OF TREASURED REMEMBRANCES OR SEEN IN THE EXTRAORDINARY PHOTOS AT HER WAKE-- WHETHER ABOUT HER GIVING A NEW WINTER COAT OFF HER BACK TO A CO-WORKER WHO HAD NONE, OR HER DAILY CARE FOR HER BELOVED GRANDCHILDREN, OR THE UNSUNG MISSIONARY WORK SHE DID FOR THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS WHO PASSED HER DESK OVER CLOSE TO 30 YEARS, OR HER TIRELESS VOLUNTEER CHARITY AND COMMUNITY SERVICE WORK, EVERYTHING WE KNOW ABOUT MARY LEE IS CAPTURED IN THOSE EIGHT SIMPLE POWERFUL WORDS “MY SOUL PROCLAIMS THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD”.

SIMPLY PUT, MARY LEE SUBMITTED HER LIFE TO GOD IN THE SERVICE OF OTHERS:

- AS A SPIRITED CHILD LIVING IN QUEENS AND SISTER TO PAT, BLESS HER MEMORY, CAROL, KAY, HELENE AND BARRY,

- IN THE CONVENT AS A DOMINICAN NUN FOR TWELVE YEARS,
- AS A PAROCHIAL SCHOOL TEACHER,
- AS A PIONEERING WOMAN GRADUATING FROM ST. FRANCIS COLLEGE,
- A LOVING, DEVOTED MOTHER, GRANDMOTHER,
- VALUED CO-WORKER AND COLLEAGUE,
- A TIRELESS VOLUNTEER,
- AS OUR FRIEND WHO WILL BE MISSED BEYOND MEASURE,

AND, AS THE GUARDIAN ANGEL AND UNSUNG CHAMPION BEHIND THE SCENES OF ALL PRIVILEGED TO KNOW HER INCLUDING THE HUNDREDS OF ALUMNI WHO HAVE ALREADY WRITTEN TO US ABOUT THE BENEFITS BESTOWED ON THEM BY HER GUIDING FIRM HAND. AND OUR MARY LEE WAS OF ENORMOUS SERVICE TO THIS NEW LAW SCHOOL DEAN AS MY TRUSTED ADVISOR. WHEN I CAME TO THE LAW SCHOOL AS A NEW DEAN, IT'S NOT JUST THAT I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING--I DIDN'T SUSPECT ANYTHING. EVEN MORE THAN THE FACT THAT MARY LEE CONTRIBUTED SIGNIFICANTLY TO EVERY SUCCESS WE ENJOYED, AS IMPORTANT, SHE PREVENTED ME FROM MAKING UNTOLD MISTAKES AND AVERTED MANY FAILURES.

WE ALL ARE IN HER DEBT. AND WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD FOR THE PRICELESS GIFT OF HER LIFE.

IT IS NOT JUST AWE-INSPIRING TO REALIZE WHAT MARY LEE DID ALL THESE YEARS, BUT HOW SHE DID IT:

OFTEN OUT OF VIEW, UNSUNG, OFTEN UNKNOWN TO THE BENEFICIARY (DEEDS SOME IN MY FAMILY WOULD SAY ARE THE HIGHEST MITZVAH—TO USE THE LATIN WORD).

SHE WAS TOUGH,

STRONG,

SMART AND SHREWD,

PERSISTENT AND SOME MIGHT SAY A LITTLE STUBBORN,

AND HAD A GIGANTIC CAPACITY FOR HARD WORK WHICH SHE DISPATCHED JOYFULLY.

AND MARY LEE WAS

GRACIOUS,

LOYAL,

SELFLESS,

KIND, WITTY, FUN, ENTHUSIASTIC

AND MOST OF ALL,

SHE WAS LOVING.

MARY LEE, WE LOVE YOU BACK, AND ALWAYS WILL.

II

IN SUCH SAD TIMES, IT HELPS PROVIDE PERSPECTIVE TO CONSIDER THE PERVERSE IRONY OF THE HUMAN CONDITION: THAT WITHOUT SADNESS, THERE CAN BE NO HAPPINESS, WITHOUT MOURNING THERE CAN BE NO COMFORT. LET ME SHARE WITH YOU SOME APT WORDS, IN FACT EIGHT BLESSINGS SPOKEN BY A YOUNG JEWISH MAN A LONG TIME AGO.

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit,*

*For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are they, who mourn,*

*For they shall be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek,*

*For they shall inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,*

*For they shall be satisfied.*

*Blessed are the merciful,*

*For they shall obtain mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure of heart,*

*For they shall see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers,*

*For they shall be called children of God.*

*Blessed are they, who are persecuted for the sake of  
righteousness,*

*For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

III

MARY LEE,

WE CANNOT SAY GOODBYE TO YOU. WE CANNOT FORGET YOU  
– EVEN IF WE TRIED. SO WE WILL NOT LET YOU GO IN OUR  
HEARTS AND MINDS AND IN WHAT WE SEE OF YOU IN EACH  
OTHER’S FACES.

THERE ARE MANY REASONS WHY THIS IS SO. LET ME MENTION  
SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT:

PETER, MARY, AMY, JUSTINA, TIANA, BRENDAN, AND LITTLE  
EMILY.

ALSO LEGIONS OF FRIENDS, FROM THE CONVENT, FROM THE  
3<sup>RD</sup> AVENUE GANG, FROM SO MANY CHARITIES AND CIVIC  
GROUPS, FROM THE LAW SCHOOL ALONE: 4 DEANS, 11

ASSOCIATE DEANS, HUNDREDS OF FACULTY AND STAFF AND THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS.

OUR OWN MARY, OUR MARY LEE, HAS BEEN A BLESSED MOTHER TO US ALL, INDELIBLY SHAPING THIS RIVER OF PEOPLE, A VIGOROUS LIVELY STREAM OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS, THAT CONSTANTLY RENEWS ITSELF IN A CONTINUOUS ETERNAL CYCLE.

RECALL THE WORDS OF THE PROPHET, ECCLESIASTES: 1:9.  
RECALL THE PROPHET'S BEAUTIFUL WORDS ABOUT THE ENDLESS CYCLE OF THE SUN, WIND, AND WATER:

*"ALL THE RIVERS RUN INTO THE SEA*

*YET THE SEA IS NOT FULL*

*UNTO THE PLACE FROM WHERE THE RIVERS COME FROM*

*THERE THEY RETURN AGAIN*

*ONE GENERATION PASSES AWAY, AND ANOTHER GENERATION COMES: BUT THE EARTH ABIDES FOREVER.*

*THE SUN ALSO ARISES, AND THE SUN GOES DOWN, AND HASTENS TO ITS PLACE WHERE IT AROSE.*

*THE WIND GOES TOWARD THE SOUTH, AND TURNS ABOUT UNTO THE NORTH, IT WHIRLS ABOUT CONTINUALLY, AND THE WIND RETURNS AGAIN ACCORDING TO ITS CIRCUIT.*



*ALL THE RIVERS RUN INTO THE SEA; YET THE SEA IS NOT FULL;  
UNTO THE PLACE FROM WHERE THE RIVERS COME, THERE  
THEY RETURN AGAIN."*

TO MARY LEE'S CHILDREN, TO HER FOUR GRANDCHILDREN, I SAY TO YOU THAT SHE WAS A GREAT WOMAN. SHE IS PART OF YOU AND WHO YOU ARE.

IF YOU ACCOMPLISH EVEN A SMALL MEASURE OF MARY LEE'S LEGACY, IF YOUR LIFE EMBRACES AND DEMONSTRATES HER QUALITIES, AND YOU WILL, THEN YOU TOO WILL BE GREAT. BY ACCEPTING AND FOLLOWING HOW SHE LIVED HER LIFE, YOU WILL HOLD ON TO MARY LEE FOREVER.

#### IV

MARY LEE'S LIFE TEACHES US ABOUT HOW WE SHOULD CONDUCT OURSELVES. HER LESSON IS: IT IS NOT WHAT YOU GATHER, BUT WHAT YOU GIVE.

MARY LEE AND I SHARED MANY THINGS. I REMINDED HER OF THE MISBEHAVING STUDENTS SHE TAUGHT IN CATHOLIC SCHOOL. SHE REMINDED ME, WELL, - OF THE NUNS I TORMENTED AT ST. PHILIP NERI'S IN NORTHPORT AND AT SACRED HEART IN SUFFERN, NEW YORK. WE BOTH SHARED A BOND AS INDEPENDENT MINDED CATHOLICS, AND WE BOTH WERE ESPECIALLY MOVED BY THE SAME PRAYER – PERHAPS

NOT SURPRISING FOR A GRADUATE OF ST. FRANCIS COLLEGE--  
MARY LEE, AND FOR SOMEONE BORN ON THE FEAST OF ST.  
FRANCIS AND WHOSE CONFIRMATION NAME IS FRANCIS--ME.  
WE SHARED THESE WORDS JUST LAST FRIDAY ON MY  
BIRTHDAY:

PRAYER OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

*"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.*

*where there is hatred, let me sow love;*

*where there is injury, pardon;*

*where there is doubt, faith;*

*where there is despair, hope;*

*where there is darkness, light;*

*and where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek*

*to be consoled as to console;*

*to be understood as to understand;*

*to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive;  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.  
Amen”*