

11-9-19 Carolyn Nektaria's Funeral Homily
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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

For those of you who are wondering, like life, an Orthodox Christian funeral does eventually come to an end.

We're gathered together today because we love Carol Nektaria, all of us here. And we assume the family, the extended family and friends who are here today, the church family, we're all here because we love her. The clergy are here serving because she loved the services of the Church. The choir is here singing voluntarily because Carol for so many years sang in the choir and helped organize the music and served the way that she did.

As an assembly of people, we have come together today because we loved her. And after all of the tens of thousands of hours that she spent helping us, why would we not give her a day? Why would we not give her a few hours of our life to see her, beautifully with love, escorted through the entire process of death, and into as we believe, eternal life. And when we gather together at a funeral like this, at first we gather openly and obviously because we have suffered a loss. Somebody that we loved is gone. A void is created in our life that really will never go away.

When I lost my own parents, one of the social workers said to my family, because I think one of us asked, do you ever get over this kind of loss? And they said, no, you don't. It creates a void in your life and you learn to live around it because when we have had the love for a person, the way that we have loved Carol Nektaria, where does that assumption come from even that that loss will go away? That loss will be healed, we will come to peace with it like a piece of furniture in the room that we don't like. Eventually we will give into its presence. That's our spouse's fault by the way, right?

We come to peace with it, we're okay with it. Eventually we realize that that void that we're living around is there because of the love that we have for the person. Not the love that we had, the love that we have. We don't like the loss, we don't like the separation that comes. One of the most painful parts of death is, in the end, our love transcends time and space. Our love is still there. Often we, particularly people of faith, we feel the presence of the person in our life still, but we miss their physical presence. That's the hard part in the end. They're not with us anymore. We can't touch them anymore, we don't hear them laugh.

With my own parents, I feel like they're on this really long vacation or trip or something and I'm still waiting for them to get home. That's the sense that I have on the inside. In the end as a believer, they already arrived home and I'm the one that's still on a journey and I'm waiting to arrive at home where they already are. But we don't want to pretend that there isn't a loss. We don't want to pretend that grief is not natural at this time. We don't want to pretend that we're okay with death or that even as Christians, it's natural, that it's just a natural part of life that we're going to experience. As believers we don't believe that, death is very unnatural.

We are created to be immortal in the presence of God. That is our conviction, and so it is very strange and unnatural to experience mortality. We were created with a beginning, but we weren't

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created to have an end. That end is a problem that we have to face, so there's great grief there and our grief feels different to many of us in a different way.

For some of us I know what this experience is like personally when our loved one has had a long journey towards death, a long decline. It is absolutely exhausting in a way that no one who has not done what we have done understands. It's like a marathon that we can't escape and that we didn't voluntarily start in the first place. And when it's finally over, there is, although a profound sense of loss, there is also a profound sense of relief, that it's finally over. That journey, that pain that we saw, the suffering that we co-suffered with has finally come to an end. Because when we love somebody and we care for them to the end, especially when it's a difficult health decline, we discover that there are things worse than death, and suffering is one of them.

And when we truly love a person, there is a point where their suffering gets to a place where we are okay with them going because the suffering they're in is worse than the death that we're going to face with them. And that's something, that sense of relief, if we don't have that, we need to be very respectful of the people who do because it's not a sign of a lack of love. It is a sign of having journeyed with the person to a degree that a lot of the rest of us did not. The majority of us did not.

For others, coming to the funeral is the very beginning of the grief process. We didn't have to really even know the person was close to death, and maybe it was a surprise and we didn't even know that they were sick. And suddenly, here we are in some strange place with a lot of people that we don't know well and the loved one is there in the midst of us. And maybe right now it's just the very beginning of our grieving the loss of our sister. Maybe we don't even really recognize her that much, and we're going to have to go through this process of coming to acceptance of the loss that has occurred.

That loss is deep and it comes in many forms, so don't be surprised how it hits you or the time it takes to resolve. But in the middle of that loss we have to find hope again because there is also a joy that we are experiencing here. And if we look at Carol Nektaria only, just her, what would she be telling us right now? We better have some hope, right? It's okay that we are mourning, but we need to find hope as well.

What was her hope? What got her through the difficulties of her own life? For those of you who have not yet, I would strongly suggest that you make sure and read the information that is in the booklet about her life. We knew her for so many years, we were with her for so much time. There's still so many secrets about her little life that we're discovering now. The way that she served people from the very beginning, how she accepted the struggles of life with a good attitude. That alone is unbelievable in this day and age. How many of us actually ever heard her complain? If you did, you're really lucky. You should play the lotto.

As a priest, I would send spies into her life to figure out what she needed because she wouldn't tell anyone. She would help anyone at any time for any reason at all. Someone she knew well, a stranger, it didn't matter. She had the gift of helping. She was always helping. You actually couldn't even get her to stop. Sometimes she meddled in her helping. You'd have to be like, really?! You're really going to ... Yes, I'm going to do this. Fine, all right.

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She was always in the office seeing what needed to get done, helping us with our newsletter every week, finding out what people needed and how she could be helpful. And then she went in and started helping Simeon in the bookstore and basically took over, didn't she? She couldn't really be told what to do. He was technically in charge, but we all knew there was a competition for that authority. Not that she wanted authority, but she wanted to help and there were always things to do.

In the choir she sang for years and years and years and did she have the greatest of voices? No, she didn't, but she was a servant. She was at every service, she was preparing the choirs books all the time, staying late into the night after an evening service, turning all of the pages, paper clipping them for the choir so that when they walked in the next day, it was just all ready to go. That is the kind of servant that she was. It's a miracle that she was the person that she was. When we look back at our life, we see the hardships that she went through, but she went through them, didn't she? She didn't give up.

She always knew there was something greater to be achieved even in the lowliest of serving and helping other people, accepting what God brought into her life and truly being at peace with it. What a wonderful example she was for all of us. And she did that because in the end she had an incredible hope in Christ. She had an incredible hope that all of this was going to pay off in the end, and has it not? Has it not? Lowly little Carol Nektaria here being buried like a queen, right?

All of us gathered around the tears, the heartbreak, but also the hope that she brings to us in Christ. She would want us to be rejoicing because the hardships are finally over. The marathon is done and she won. There is no more suffering and she suffered. There is no more pain and she was in pain. There is no longer the hardships of this life, and if you paid attention to what we're saying and said in the service up to this point, we're not pretending that life is jolly, are we? We're not pretending that it's easy. We're not pretending that there are not constant sacrifices that have to be made, and they are only endurable when we choose to accept them.

If we choose to try to be bitter against and to escape the sufferings of life, we turn into terrible people because we're never getting our way. Everything is going against us. And when we look to somebody like Carol Nektaria we see that in giving in to the being at peace in the hope of Christ with the circumstances of her life, she was filled with hope and a joyful person. Even her house was a terrible wreck at times, we all know that. Those who know her well, it was in terrible shape. By the grace of God, the church community came together with the help of the family and we fixed that situation and made it a beautiful home in the end. But she had a joy and a hope that we have to also accept in order to properly see her into the grave.

The suffering and the struggle is over for her and if we have any belief, she is now where she wanted to be for so long, she is home. She is with the Christ that she worshiped and served all of her life so incredibly faithfully against all odds. And all of a sudden in the midst of the grief and the pain, we start realizing that there is not only hope, but there is also joy. There's also joy. Life is worth living when your love is centered on the people around you and when you accept that which is in your life as she did. And we want to have that joy for her.

We are, as Orthodox Christians, we're sort of like ... I forgot what the term is. What's the really complex science that everybody's into today? Somebody help me. Quantum physics, thank you very

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much. I don't say it often, so it was gone. We're like quantum physicists. We really are. That might be a big ... If you're not a believer and think, Father, that's the furthest you could possibly be from being a believer, but it's not. It's actually very close. It's two opposite fields that have gone so far into the extreme that they met on the other side because everything that we deal with as Christians is invisible. None of it can be seen, none that can be proven, none of it can be touched. It's not tangible at all what we're really striving for. It's invisible. It's beyond us, it's a power that we don't even understand. And yet having given ourselves over to it, and this is where the hope and the joy really comes into our life, having given ourselves over to experimenting with that invisible reality, we start finding that there's principles that work and that can be proven. And suddenly, the invisible life starts becoming very predictable to us. We can't even see what's going on, but we know if we do this, this is the result. So there's a reality there that we can't prove exists, but we know for certain that it's there and we're working on it.

As Orthodox Christians, we experiment with the spiritual life. We read the scientists of our theology and our spirituality and we copy what they say, we mimic it. And then we have an experience or an experiment of our own. And Carol Nektaria was that kind of spiritual quantum physicist. She lived her life based in a faith of an unprovable invisible reality that the more she entered into it, the more it became true and tangible and real in her life, and very understandable and natural to her. And she has entered into that joy.

What are the odds that she would be here today after the life that she had? What would the world say how her life would have ended up? Did she ever have a great job that paid tons of money? Fame, power, authority? No, none of that. And here she is surrounded by more people than a lot of people have at the end of their life these days. You don't even want to know how many people die in an old folks' home somewhere with no one present. No one, not even the staff. And here she is surrounded again buried like a queen.

She has the riches that she put off, that she invested in in paradise today. Like the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Abraham says to him, after death, you had all the good things in your life and now Lazarus has all the good things after his death. Carol has gone from being, we could say poor, to being rich, from being humble and unknown, to being glorious in the presence of God. Our God, we believe is outside of time and space and so as we gather here today, it does not matter that she died four days ago.

God being outside of time and space in the omnipresent moment sees us here and we believe that she sees us here as well. Where not our God, our saints and our departed loved ones are not trapped within time and space. They're outside of it and they see everything all at once in the presence that God creates. That is why we pray for our departed after they are dead. God is not trapped in chronology. Do you know that? He doesn't need you to pray before someone dies in order to hear you. He is outside of time. We continue to pray for our beloved after they died because God continues to hear us and He heard us maybe before they were even born.

We pray for our ancestors because God hears those prayers outside of time and we pray for our beloved even now, today, that she would be blessed in the death process, that she would have the grace of God to face death with courage as she did without complaining, with peace and hope and faith.

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So let's continue this journey with her physically. Spiritually, she is with God. Physically, she is still with us. We have a responsibility for our beloved sister right now to take care of her body. God is taking care of taking care of her soul.

And so we will now finish, we will now all say goodbye to her. We'll all now take her to the cemetery and put her into the ground. We will care for her in death as we did in life, and as she would care for us.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.