

+Kathleen Patricia Mignini

1946-2019

Funeral Mass

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President-Rector Emeritus and Homilist

St. Mary's Seminary & University Chapel  
January 10, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

Thanks to everyone for your presence and your prayers. I am honored that Tony Mignini asked me to deliver the homily for his wife and the mother of his children.

The liturgical program you're holding is a beautiful statement of the loving care Tony and his two daughters have taken in passing the life of Kathleen Mignini back to Almighty God. Kathy Walsh's touching eulogy printed in the program and Anne Askey's words at the beginning of the liturgy have given us all a sense of how much they loved and treasured their mother and grandmother to their children.

I

From the Thanksgiving Feast through Christmas to the Sunday of Epiphany, Tony Mignini's family has suffered a small lifetime of shock, sorrow, hope, memory, and finally gratitude. This liturgy demonstrates how religious survivors like them survive loss -- because of the faith and love Kathy herself represented.

In this chapel this morning, an extended family of relatives, friends, seminary faculty, and co-workers gather to pray for Kathleen on her journey to God and for the family she has left behind. A bishop, several seminary rectors and faculty members, distinguished archdiocesan priests and alumni are present because of the kind of woman Kathleen Mignini was, for the love she radiated in all directions, for the joy so many felt in her presence.

II

The scripture readings are printed in the funeral program and speak for themselves. Saint Paul encourages the Corinthians not to lose heart in the face of death. There is another eternal dwelling for the human soul which has been torn away from its earthly

home. For our eternal dwelling, we rely only on spiritual metaphors – God’s presence, risen life, communion of saints, eternal joy, lasting peace, a heavenly liturgy.

Saint John tells us in Jesus’ own words that those who have passed into the world of death will hear in that stony silence the very voice of the Son of God. God’s voice will bring them back from earthly sleep to new life in Christ.

Before she finally heard that divine voice, Kathy possibly could make out our choked-up prayers for her as she lay passively at the threshold to another world. Her passport among the living had not yet expired; her visa to new life in heaven had not yet been issued. Family and clergy stood together before a mystery no one fully comprehends.

It has rightly been said, “Love disarms the soul. Suffering overpowers it.” It’s that simple. Tears of joy, tears shed in grief are the proof of it. The human way of answering the unanswerable mysteries is to pray and to come together like this, to cry and to remember, to laugh and turn to the consolation of sacrament and music. The Body of Christ answers in song and celebration for those orphaned by loss. Disarmed and overpowered, as Tony and his family are, you are not alone.

### III

Who is it that we have lost? Her birth certificate says -- “Kathleen Marie Kavanagh.” As a kid she was called Patsy which explains why Patricia was added. In marriage, Kathleen Patricia took the name Mignini. Her signature -- *Kathleen P. Mignini*, her initials *KPM*. She was a wife, a mother, a grandmother, a friend, and a working girl. She was beautiful and she was very smart. Who is it that we have lost?

In 1986, Kathy answered a newspaper ad for a bookkeeper which Rick Childs needed in the finance office of St. Mary’s Seminary & University. Tony Mignini is an alumnus of St. Charles College and Paca Street, so the seminary scene was familiar to Kathy. For the next twenty-six years, Kathy Mignini was one of our most respected employees, rising to the position of Director of Reservations and Institutional Services in the Center for Continuing Formation. I could not count the number of events and guests she capably cared for in The Center. She became this seminary’s chief concierge where she made all the arrangements from dining to housekeeping to hosting dignitaries to making sure there was enough Irish whiskey for late night soirees of biblical scholars.

I know I speak for all of you who knew and remember Kathy when I say she was the incarnation of energy and personality. On first hearing of her stroke, my first thought was how could that possibly happen to someone so alive and so buoyant as Kathy? Yes, we know life can end at any moment and that the most beautiful music will have a final

chord. But her song seemed destined to go on and on. William Butler Yeats sums up our confusion, "How can we tell the dancer from the dance."

She was pure movement in my memory – from the day I first saw that black Lincoln Town Car she drove in 1986 pull into our parking lot doing – what? – thirty MPH – and swing flawlessly into a small parking space, until the day she called me about solving a puzzling financial mystery, until her very last phone call – Kathy was sheer energy and enthusiasm. She was just a joy to be around, totally undaunted by challenges. And, she had great common sense. She was not defeated by her defeats but was able to bounce back from them. A few years ago, Kathy had both knees replaced to keep up her pace in life, to not hold Tony back. Nothing got in her way or slowed her down.

I enjoyed her company, her pasta and great gin and tonics, her matter-of-fact take on affairs. Kathy gave you the straight dope. Her smile and warmth were genuine. She saw through charlatans. A deep faith powered her past troubles. She was a straight-shooter, a crackerjack with numbers and balance sheets and ledgers, accounts payable/accounts receivable.

In 2013, Kathy retired from her position here so she and Tony could spend more time with the children, to travel and enjoy the winter months in Florida. Over the years, I spent several wonderful vacations with Kathy and Tony in Italy and in Bermuda. Even on vacation, she got up early to make breakfast and cook Tony's bacon and eggs the way he liked them.

As a young person, Kathy lived a somewhat sheltered life. She spent twelve years at IND with the School Sisters of Notre Dame. After that she seemed destined for the footlights. At eighteen, Kathy won the Miss Carling Beauty Pageant. She was "Miss Congeniality" in another contest, and either won or was a finalist in two or three more. She even auditioned as a dancer for the Rockettes in New York. Instead of joining a chorus line, Kathy decided to take up the drums. She became a girl percussionist. Lucky for Tony Mignini that she did.

At a gig downtown in the mid-1960s, Kathy Kavanagh was playing drums in a band that had Tony as accordionist. With teardrop drumsticks and soft brushes and a gentle foot pedal, this beautiful blonde kept up the beat. I'd have to imagine Tony Mignini had the damndest time concentrating on his accordion that night while checking the stunning drummer out. What he never suspected was that the girl on drums herself was beginning to fall in love with him.

For 53 years Kathy and Tony made some beautiful music together as a married couple. She gave birth to two lovely daughters – Kathleen and Anne. They were active post-

Vatican II lay Catholics in St. Anthony's Parish where Msgr. Tony Dziwulski was pastor and Father Fran Malooly assistant. Anne and Don, Kathy and Andy were each married in this chapel with Father Fran officiating. Kathy became Mom-Mom to six wonderful grandchildren. Her first grandchild was named Maria.

Then, came Olivia, Thomas, and Bella Askey. And, Abby and Sydney Walsh. Kathy Mignini adopted her two sons-in-law, Don Askey and Andy Walsh, as her own sons. She became "Mom" to the next generation. What she gave all of you, you can keep forever.

#### IV

In 1993, we were told that Pope John Paul II would visit Baltimore two years later and that St. Mary's Seminary would be the last stop on his itinerary. Jesuit Father Roberto Tucci, S.J., from the Vatican, had told me two years running that only seminarians and only priests, and absolutely no lay persons, were to be present here for the pope's parting audience. Two years running I heard him insist on that. Two years running, I nodded. At the last minute, I changed my mind.

Kathy Mignini and Marianne Murphy on our staff had just become grandmothers. They asked if they could bring their grandchildren for the pope's blessing. Yes, I said. I carefully positioned them in front of a space cordoned off for dignitaries and the Holy Father at the seminary's main entrance. When an opportunity presented itself, my eyes and Kathy's met, and I gestured for her to step over the cordon-rope with Maria and approach the Holy Father. She wasted no time, jumped the rope and presented infant Maria for the Holy Father to kiss. The scene is immortalized on Vatican Video. The look of joy on Kathy's face that afternoon, I will never forget.

#### V

To Tony, my friend, my lawyer and my sometime golfing and traveling partner, we all know what she felt for you. No words will possibly restore what death has torn from your arms. If in marriage, two become one flesh, you have suffered an amputation in the heart.

"Widow" and "widower" are names for survivors. A "widow's walk" is a small crow's nest atop large homes we've all seen on the Maine coast and elsewhere. From that rooftop perch, the wives of seamen could watch for signs of husbands on ships swept up in a storm.

The 7th floor neuroscience wing of the University of Maryland Medical Center turned into a widow's walk for Tony's family for almost three weeks. Priests visited to recite a

few prayers for a safe passage. Our eyes and hearts scanned the monitors for signs of hope that an inner storm was lifting. At some point, Tony and the girls became reconciled to the likelihood that the ship carrying the soul of Kathleen P. Mignini was already steering to heaven's safe harbor. They paced on the widow's walk, but it was Kathy in another kingdom already praying for them.

To the family, let me say this from an older public man a little experienced in human grief. The choked-up sorrow you feel today and will feel for a long time to come for this loss is painful in ways you could never have imagined. Didn't I say suffering overpowers, and that love disarms? Do not fear.

A broken heart should never completely heal or forget. But the heart pierced by grief does grow new chambers which pump life into the next generation. A sorrowful heart can still beat in joy to the memory of a beautiful and good wife, mother, grandmother, and friend. She was, as Tony would say, simply selfless and unselfconsciously good. What a legacy to pass on.

Like all deaths of loved ones, Kathy's death is destined by God's will to bear fruit in your souls. Do not fear. Our vocation as mortals in this world is only to believe, to love and suffer its loss, to pity and to remember the dead. If we do that, we will hear the voice of Jesus call us to life when our time comes.

## VI

Joined as one, Kathy and Tony had their differences as all couples do. Tony is very neat and orderly about his desk, as a lawyer needs to be. Kathy's desk here was a total mess. But she knew where everything was and could put a finger on a bill or piece of paper immediately. Her kitchen was a gallery of yellow post-it note reminders and coupons. Tony told me just because you're neat like me doesn't necessarily mean you know where anything is. But, Kathy did.

That included birthdays and anniversaries which Kathy remembered religiously. She whispered names of people that Tony should know but had forgotten at public events like she was staff to a senator. He slept in later after retirement. Kathy got up early and said her prayers from a little prayer book like a nun, planning her day, making his bacon and eggs. In business, Kathy was all business. And, let's be honest, she could be a handful - formidable, a little force of nature.

Tony loves TV and sports. Kathy didn't watch much TV. She read novels instead or did the New York Times crossword puzzle as Tony was glued to the set. Once vacationing in Bar Harbor, Maine, they planned to book into a quaint hotel where Winston Churchill once stayed. Tony inquired at the front desk if the Churchill Suite had a TV. It

didn't. So, unbeknownst to his wife, he booked another room with a television. Needless to say, Kathy was not happy and would not let him forget it.

Her navigational skills were also amazing. She fell in love with the smart phone app WAZE as her GPS. She was Tony's co-pilot and navigator and travel advisor. I remember when we were together in Italy in 2004 how she read maps as we drove through the impossible lanes and alleys of villages in Tuscany like Lucca, Camaiore and along the Cinque Terre. Her instinct for directions got us where we needed to go. She just knew the way.

Once when Tony and I were busy watching an LPGA golf tournament at Bulle Rock Golf Course, Kathy was in line getting lottery tickets for some prizes. She won them a trip to Portugal for doing that. That's how she was. Thinking ahead. Seizing opportunities. Not looking back.

## VII

Sandwiched in between the Book of Judges and the Book of First Samuel in the Bible is a touching little book about love -- The Book of Ruth -- only four chapters long. It records an exchange between Ruth and Naomi which could be Kathy's epitaph as a Mignini: "Wherever you go, I will go, wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die and there be buried." ((Ruth 1:16-17)

Those who know her life story and her love for her husband also know that if by some heavenly premonition Kathy had known over fifty years ago that her life would end as it did this past December, even so she would still have played those drums that night, fallen in love with the man on accordion, have borne these two daughters and embraced their husbands as her own children and loved these grandchildren, and that she would still have retired when she did and moved to Naples with Tony last August. She would have said seeing how life would unfold for her -- *Che sera, sera*.

Kathy trusted that God would always make the imperfect perfect for those who love him in life and in death. She always would say to me that God answered all her prayers. That's because she didn't pray for herself -- this selfless woman -- and said at the end of every prayer, "Thy will be done."

And, she knew that prayer was the way to inner peace and that candles lit in dark churches to burn into the night with her silent prayers were a way to love others and to protect them from a distance. If there are candles in the kingdom of heaven, she's lighting one now.

At the end of this Mass, in memory of Kathy, we will all light candles. Think of them as the little fire of a personal Easter in January.

The silent thunderclap which took her from her family and friends cannot take her from their hearts. In the liturgy - in the hymns, in the readings, in the intercessory prayers and gifts, in the bread of life and the cup of salvation we share, she is still with us. In the holy communion and in the holy candle light we know and love her in the Risen Christ.

In our recessional we will sing this: "Sing with All the Saints in Glory" - saying "All around the clouds are breaking. Soon the storms of time shall cease; In God's likeness we awaken, knowing everlasting peace." "Shout with joy, O deathless voices. Child of God, lift up your head."

Kathleen Patricia Mignini -- rest in peace in our Father's House.