

Preaching for Sr. Mary Bergin's funeral

Prepared by Sr. Lucy Vazquez OP and delivered by Sr. Anne Lythgoe, OP

Columbus Motherhouse Chapel June 21, 2026

Introduction: Good morning sisters. Good morning to everyone who is joining us via livestream today. We are happy to welcome Mary's family members who are with us today: her nieces Sue Tunno and Peggy Rayer and nephew Mike Cleary: Welcome!

And joining us via livestream her sisters Mil Pappas and Peg Elser, along with their families who are joining us via livestream.

It is my privilege this morning to deliver a homily prepared for today by Lucy Vazquez, an Adrian Dominican. [Lucy, I am happy you can join us today from Orlando along with Ann Englert] Lucy was a dear friend of Mary's, and she happened to be my Novice Director. A long and interesting story to be shared later.

So for now, let me share Lucy's preaching:

Many years ago, Mary very casually said to me, "I put you down to preach at my funeral." I tucked that away in the recesses of my mind, hoping I would never have to face it, but here we are.

Mary was a quiet person. She was a planner, a brilliant leader who ministered to the de 'Ricci congregation in countless different capacities – numerous times as General Chapter delegate, as Novice Director, two terms as President of the congregation, and Director of St. Catherine Hall to name just a few. She always accepted the challenges of leadership with grace. She was kind, considerate and compassionate, and her loving care of the senior and infirm Sisters at St. Catherine's Hall was an example to us all. She loved her family. In her later years she delighted in the pictures of her nieces' and nephews' new babies. She loved her friends, she loved the sisters and she loved her God deeply, though, true to her Irish heritage, she was not the most demonstrative of people. If I had to put it in a simple phrase, she lived her entire life for others. She loved a good discussion, but not an argument. In so many ways she had such a strong influence in so many of our lives. True to her nature, she loved watching golf tournaments better than contact sports. And, underneath that calm demeanor, she had a will of steel and could be quite stubborn, which some of us knew quite well. I can just feel her shaking her head at me right now! She was a blessing to us all.

Mary never told me why she chose the readings for this celebration of her life, and knowing her, I suspect she would cringe at the very thought of a celebration of her life. You see, those of us who knew her for a long time know full well that she did not like a fuss, especially when it had

anything to do with her. We know she liked to keep things simple, and she preferred to keep any limelight away from herself. [*Thus, the memorial card does not have her picture — as she requested— it has a painting of St. Catherine de ‘Ricci’*] She also liked to keep things brief and concise, so today’s readings certainly fill that requirement.

But today’s readings do more than that. The theme that is woven through all of them could not be more powerful: our loving God’s promise of salvation to each and every one of us is solid, as solid as Jesus’ resurrection. Isaiah uses the imagery of a feast of rich foods and choice wines to assure us that our God will destroy death forever, and because of that, we will rejoice. Our God will gently wipe the tears from all faces because death will not be an end but a promise of new life in which we will all share.

The promise of salvation is there in the Hebrew Scriptures, even before the birth of Jesus. Then, just in case we were not listening, the first letter to the Corinthians tells us: “So as in Adam all die, so in Christ all come to life again,” and you can take that to the bank. That is not just our hope, that’s our assurance and our birthright. No need to fear, no need to wonder, no need to fret because we are children of that promise. And that promise reaches its crescendo in John’s gospel when we are assured by Jesus himself: “All that the Father gives me shall come to me and no one who comes will I ever reject. Indeed, this is the will of my Father that everyone who looks upon the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life.” Jesus did not say this because it sounded good. The gospel did not record it because pages needed to be filled. No, this was the manifestation of the foundation of Jesus’ mission, the sealing of his promise to us.

I believe that the choice of these readings is Mary’s final gift to us. She wants us to know that all is well. She wants to assure us that Jesus’ promise to all of us has now been fulfilled for her. She wants us to know that the promise of salvation, the promise of new life has become real for her just as it will become real for each of us. That, I believe, is Mary’s quiet, unassuming but forceful message to us,

My heart, love and prayers go out to Mary’s family, especially Mil and Peg, and to her friends, especially to Madeline. I know how much we will miss Mary on this earth, but I also know we will rejoice with her in glory. I would like to close with a very brief story.

Mary once told me that as a young child when she would go to church with her family for Benediction, and they would pray the Divine Praises and would come to “Blessed be Mary, Virgin and Mother,” she always thought they were saying, “Blessed be Mary **Bergin** and Mother” and she thought it was wonderful that the whole church was acknowledging her and her mother. Indeed, today we can all say, blessed be Mary Bergin and mother.

Anne Lythgoe, OP:

Thank you, Lucy.

I cannot let this moment go by without adding a few words.

Mary was a hero to me, a quiet woman who practiced her Dominican Life out loud. She had a simplicity of lifestyle yet understood the complexities of the world. When I was in formation at our Motherhouse in Media, PA, Mary would sometimes give me a quiet look, a gesture or a one sentence comment that was instantly clear to me!

Pay attention to what is happening in the room. How can you be helpful? How can you anticipate the needs of those in the room?

It is difficult to acknowledge that Mary has passed over and is not here anymore. Somehow, for me, she was always here and would always be here.

But that is magical thinking.

But something she said to me I have held close all these years: in Luke's Gospel, Jesus said: "To whom much has been given, much will be expected."

In this comment, Mary set before me a path of life that is echoed in the words of Peter: "Place your gifts at the service of the Gospel." And she did that all her life, and I can only hope to mirror a small portion of her spirit.

Amen