

Welcome
Sister Kristin Funari's Funeral Liturgy

By Sister Susan Francois, CSJP

We gather this morning to celebrate the life of a shining light in our lives, Sister Kristin Funari, who burned with a passion for everything that is good.

Many of us are used to Kristin herself giving the welcome at an occasion such as this. I know I am, yet it is also a deep honor and a privilege to be the one to welcome you today on behalf of Kristin, her family, and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace.

We gather in this beautiful sanctuary, yet we pine to be at home in our own Chapel. As you know, those of us who live at St. Michael's experienced a major fire last month, and we are still adjusting to our new reality. We are grateful to be able to find shelter here at St. Anastasia's. As it happens, I discovered this weekend that Kristin took Anastasia as her confirmation name when she was a young woman, so perhaps this was meant to be.

We welcome Kristin's brother Ralph and his wife Chickie, along with their children

Felicia and her husband Stephen, Renata and her husband Craig, and Anthony and his girlfriend Kim, as well as Kristin's grand nephews Ashton, Nicholas, and Sebastian. We also welcome Kristin's Sandra, her husband Joe, and their daughter Kristin.

We remember too Kristin's parents Ivo and Helen, her Auntie Viola and Uncle Joe and her sister Ricky. I have no doubt that they are enjoying great Italian meals and catching up on all the news of the Funari family among the stars.

When 20 year old Elaine applied to enter the Congregation in 1965 as a postulant, she wrote in her application that she wished "to bring myself and others to God." Decades later, in an interview with Jan Linley, Kristin reflected that "seeking God and seeking truth is part of why I stay and why I entered. You know, really wanting to know God." Kristin has finally lived into the deep desire she expressed in her final vows, "to live in the joy of a celibate love that does not lie in a separation from but a deeper penetration into the universe." She is now at one with God, with the angels, and the stars.

But we all know that Kristin's life shined bright like the stars when she was with us. She was passionate about community, her family, and poor and marginalized people. She was passionate about good food and a nice drink at the end of the day. She was passionate about life ... and of that, any of us who were ever on the losing side of an argument with Kristin, have no doubt.

When Kristin was featured in an article in the National Catholic Reporter in 1996, she outlined her passions.

“I’m passionate about the gospels,” she said. “Passionate about the economy. I want to get more passionate about the poor. Get more passionate about the violence in our cities in the United States and say what can we do to change that. ... I get passionate about the suffering that’s caused by all that and then the wrong people who are blamed. Passionate about the beatitudes. Passionate about the truth being the way. None of us have the total truth. Passionate about us being able to peel that apart together and break it open together and single-mindedly staying in community, pursuing those gospel truths. That’s what makes my passion. I get passionate when I see real struggle around who we say we are or want to be.”

Community was a constant in Kristin’s life. She built community wherever she was. As a social worker in Rockleigh and in Jersey City, at St. Boniface and of course, the York Street Project, Kristin loved and learned from those she served and accompanied them as they made positive change in their own community. In Congregation leadership, Kristin challenged us to face the future with gratitude and hope, while staying true to our roots as what she called meat and potato women. Before her death last year, Sister Jeanne Keaveny, who taught Kristin in Penns Grove, described Kristin to me as someone who had one foot firmly in the past, and one foot firmly in the future.

Kristin was unforgettable. We heard many stories to that effect last night at the wake. She left a lasting impression on everyone she met. I would often joke that Kristin would even make the local dog catcher feel like he was her dear friend. You felt like a valued whole person in her presence. Relationships and community, presence and hospitality were part of Kristin’s core. Who among us did not enjoy her delicious cooking, her infectious laughter, her open heart, her willingness to always make room at the table for one more?

And so today, we gather at this table, to celebrate this shining light in our lives. We know that she is now one with her loving God, penetrated by love. Let us now give thanks for her transformation from death into life through the celebration of this liturgy.

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