

SR. EILEEN CATTERSON, DW, MD, 83
SR. EILEEN OF OUR LADY
3/22/35 – 1/15/2019

Wisdom is mobile
beyond all
motion...

She renews
everything while
herself perduring;

Passing into holy
souls from age to
age, she produces
friends of God
and prophets.

Wis 7:24-26

SEEKER

HEALER/
TEACHER

FRIEND OF GOD/



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Sr. Marie Chiodo, DW

The scripture readings and Eileen's life suggest the image of a mobile over a child's crib to me. Dangling from that mobile are three figures: Eileen, the Seeker, Eileen the Healer and Teacher and Eileen, the Friend of God and Prophet. One need only press the fast motion button on this mobile to see Eileen's life swirl before us.

EILEEN: THE SEEKER

In Eileen's own words, "Wisdom, God was an irresistible fascination for me - like a fatal attraction." That description of Eileen's fascination with the holy has stayed with me over the years

I knew Eileen, as many of you did, as a seeker of God. She sought and found God in the Scriptures, in lectures, in books. But most profoundly in true Celtic tradition, Eileen sought and found God in everyday events, in people, especially the poor, in abused women, and in oppressed peoples. I say in true Celtic tradition because in Celtic spirituality, every aspect of the natural world and humanity is steeped in God. There is no separation – no sacred and secular. God is in all. And Eileen's keen intellect, seduced with this God fascination, sought that God in all creatures, in all of creation. The first reading affirms that oneness and closeness of God: "Wisdom penetrates and pervades all things, is a breath of God, a mirror of God."

There are two things that I especially loved about Eileen's pursuit of God. One, she almost always did it with others, inviting all kinds of different perspectives and many of us, Daughters of Wisdom, shared that exploration with her.

The other was that she did not inflict her understanding of God or life's meaning on others. At one point Eileen and several of us gave Wisdom retreats in West Virginia. We gave them primarily to groups of Philippino women. Eileen showed innate respect for their traditional cultural devotions to God as Father, even as she invited them to think of Wisdom as the feminine Divine.

As a seeker, Eileen perfected the art of listening to and entering into the world of those different from herself. It served her well in things of the spirit and medical practice, which leads me to the second figure dangling on the mobile.



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EILEEN: THE HEALER AND TEACHER

We are all aware of Eileen’s training as a nurse and as a pediatrician and her many achievements in both fields. In West Virginia, five of our Sisters worked with Eileen in the



Rhodell clinic. Sr. Joan Klemballa was with Eileen through thick and thin at the Pineville clinic. There Joan was further trained by her friend and the best of mentors, Eileen.

What is perhaps less known is Eileen’s passion for justice in her chosen fields. Examining and diagnosing illness or physical problems was merely the tip of the iceberg for Eileen. She went beneath the surface to listen to her patients’ stories, their financial situations, their safety concerns in dysfunctional families, their need for assistance. She advocated for abused and at-risk children with child protective services, hospitals, and the State

Medical Association, seeking to acquire medical equipment, medical coverage, and so much more for them!

Being a healer and being a teacher was a natural for Eileen. Her teaching, like her approach to healing, was focused on the deeper dimension of training her medical students to see not only a physical need but the fuller realities of the patients’ lives and the respect they deserved.

For Eileen, it was always about how to bring health and hope to the children and families. Some of the most beautiful pictures we have are those where Eileen is holding one of her children – she positively beams! She lived the Gospel we just proclaimed: “Let the children come to me, do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” This past Christmas, Eileen spoke with deep sadness about the plight of children in our world today.

When we think of the profound impact Eileen had on so many lives in such diverse ways: healthcare, teaching, spirituality, the words from the Book of Wisdom resonate: she was indeed “mobile beyond all motion.”

Which leads me to the third figure dangling on the mobile:

EILEEN: FRIEND OF GOD AND PROPHET



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Surely, Eileen is one of those holy souls into whom Wisdom passed, making her “a friend of God and prophet.” This verse was one of her favorite images of Wisdom, and without realizing it, she had become the Wisdom whom she loved. To be a friend of God and a prophet were not differing realities. There was no distinction between loving friendship with God and acting as God’s prophet. One cannot have one without the other. Eileen had come full circle- all was one- **God and human suffering, even her own, were truly one reality**, as her Celtic heart had always suspected.



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So, I keep asking myself: How did Eileen get to this place of oneness with Wisdom?

There were many factors. I would like to speak to five of them that set the mobile in motion in Eileen’s life

1st Factor: Eileen would probably start with Grace O’Malley, her 16th century pirate Queen ancestor from County Mayo. Queen Grace ruled Ireland, sailed on and commanded 20 ships and hundreds of men, changing the way women were treated even in the 16th century. She was “of a stubborn nature,” as she fought off the English! Can we detect some DNA at work here?

2nd Factor: In Eileen’s acquisition of Wisdom was her stubbornness. To quote Eileen, herself, and her sister, Cathy, there was this incredible stubborn streak, via the O’Malley DNA, that made her perdure when her passion for mission was ignited, or injustice reared its head. That stubbornness accounts for the many abused women Eileen helped and the women she supported in seeking a medical career.

It was that stubborn tenacity that enabled Eileen, as President of the West Virginia Board of Medicine, to ensure that “incompetent, addicted and dishonest physicians” were censured or removed from practice.

3rd Factor: Oneness with Wisdom was visible in the deep family roots of this Irish lass from Queens, NY. In her extended Irish clan, she was looked up to as a steadying force. And of course, she was the “nun” who could do no wrong.



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Eileen's family was so proud of her. Eileen was surrounded by the love of her parents, Catherine and William, her brother, Bill and sister, Cathy. Later Bill's wife, Rose Anne and Cathy's husband, Mike would join their family stories to the rich lore of the O'Malley and Catterson clan. The long and loud discussions, parties and just plain loving one another set the stage for Eileen's hospitality and oneness with Wisdom.

And if ever you wanted an "Eileen grin" from ear to ear, you just had to get her talking about Joseph, Will, Eileen and Mia, her nephews, niece and grand-niece who are with us today. Eileen is so proud of each of you and your adventures over the years. And Mia, Aunt Eileen loved playing scrabble with you as much as you loved playing with her.

4th Factor: To understand Eileen's oneness with Wisdom, one must know of Eileen's inimitable gift of being a true Gaelic Senachie, the Irish storyteller, whose stories bewitched children and adults alike, even when they sounded like pure blarney.

One example was during a Celtic retreat that some of us made with Eileen in Ireland. We went one day to a wooded area in Sligo where a huge stone altar had been erected during the early 1900's - the time of the troubles in Ireland. On the stone altar was the deep imprint of a hand. Eileen told us that it was the handprint of St. Patrick and all who come there place their hand in his. Each of us, despite knowing Patrick had lived in the 5th century, lovingly /believingly laid our hand on Patrick's imprinted hand. Ireland always, and Eileen often flourished in fantasy and whimsy.

5th Factor: Finally, Eileen became one with Wisdom through creativity, friendship, and strong faith. She was an artist, played the guitar and learned the dulcimer; was a poet and writer; had a major interest in politics, spirituality, and theology; medical advances and world realities- she was Renaissance woman.

Friendship with Eileen was a delightful surprise – one never knew what ideas she would come up with next, or what "Happy/Holy hour" she would suggest! What I know from our friendship is she is one of the sincerest friends I have - speaking the truth as she sees it, even when we disagreed with each other - because friends are able to love each other in the good and the bad times.

Eileen's strong faith, in some of the troubled times of her life, kept her going. The financial failure of the Rhodell clinic, her being called back to NY, the gradual health issues with which she struggled tested Eileen's faith, and at times even her faith in those who loved her most dearly.



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But this past year brought a gentling, a calm in Eileen that was pure grace, pure joy to behold. She spoke of how good the sisters at Sound Beach were- how holy! Eileen, from my vantage point, was claiming her place among us as the woman of Wisdom that we knew her to be.

And so on January 15th Eileen's face was a picture of calm as she slipped through the Celtic "thin space" where the veil between the world and the spiritual realm dissolves and where Eileen encounters those who have gone before her.

The whirling figures of the mobile- her seeking, healing, teaching, befriending and prophetic serving came to a standstill.

I like to think that at that moment Eileen encountered Wisdom in such a way that she realized her fascination with God was the same as God's fascination with her.

Eileen knew in the depths of her being that she was loved.

Welcome home, Eileen.

Sr. Marie Chiodo, DW

1/22/19

