

Order of Service  
Funeral  
Eileen Rose Knight RIP  
11.45 am Friday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2011

Handel's Largo

Sentences of Scripture

Hymn 466: Praise My Soul

Psalm 90 (said) p246

Brother James' Air (choir)

Ecclesiastes 3<sup>1-15</sup>

Hymn 2: Abide With Me

I Corinthians 15<sup>20-58</sup>

Address

Hymn 362: Shine Jesus Shine

Prayers p133

Hymn 640: You Shall Go Out With Joy

I Know that My Redeemer Liveth

### Eileen Rose Knight RIP

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

I am sure you will have noticed Max sitting on the pulpit steps. Whenever we were going out my mother always asked me if Max was coming. She didn't like him to be left alone. And that is one essential characteristics of my mother. She was always a kind person, to people and to animals. She would never harm anything and she could never understand how some people can be cruel.

Eileen Rose Fowler, as she then was, was born in Wainscott 19<sup>th</sup> September 1928. When she was about three her family moved to Prospect Avenue Frindsbury, which remained her parents' home for the rest of their lives. Life between the wars was quite tough for most people, but it helped considerably that my grandfather was a shipwright and was never out of work. Her memories of those times included Gordon Road Infants' School, her grandparents keeping the Sans Pareil public house and Co-op treats in the field opposite. Also Stood Fair. According to family legend my mother had to be weaned abruptly and on Bournvita when my grandmother experienced the shock of a customer standing next to her at the Sans Pareil dropping dead on the spot. Eileen also attended Sunday School at Frindsbury church where her father's first job as a boy had been to assist the organ builder.

At the start of the War, the family was evacuated to Whitstable, but when it became apparent that the Kent coast could be as dangerous as the Medway Towns, they were relocated in South Wales. Contrary to the popular stereotype, my mother and her brother Charles were treated extremely well by the family who took them in in Pontywain and they remained friends up to the present day. It is quite a thought, however, that at the age of eleven my mother was expected to look after her younger brother and live a new life with a new family a very long way away from home. We should be very thankful that today's eleven year olds do not have to accept such responsibilities or face such challenges and dangers. I cannot help but feel, however, that our over protectiveness of children and young adults today risks frustrating their potential as developing human beings.

The evacuees had to share the village school with the Welsh children, which meant that both sets of children only did half a school day, but they nevertheless learnt all the basics – a credit to them and their teachers.

My mother, as a child, was always put to bed with prayers and this continued when she was evacuated. My sister and I were also always prayed with at bedtime by both our parents and we revived this custom in my mother's last illness – which was a great comfort to both of us and something I now miss. People who don't know about the power of prayer are at a great disadvantage and it is their loss that so many households no longer take care of the spiritual development of their children. Another example of frustrating their human potential.

Eileen returned from Wales and went to school at Fort Pitt. My mother was very skilful working with her hands. She could design and make clothes. Since living with me, she has done all the beautiful needlework which now adorns the Rectory walls. She was quite good

at painting, though she never admitted it. Her paintings on boards were piled up in the shed where no-one could see them, till last year I got them out and propped them against the flower pots in the garden to stop the badgers digging up our tulip bowls. For a while it looked like the Left Bank in Paris.

My mother was a very determined person and had considerable ability. She had creative ideas about how she wanted her successive houses and gardens and was quite prepared to learn how to do things and to work hard to achieve what she wanted. Maybe this was just as well because my father and I were quite useless at jobs like painting and decorating or handyman skills and generally found it easier to let things be than to change anything. My grandfather and my uncle, however, could generally be relied on to help out where necessary. My grandfather considered a dinner of egg chips a fair wage for or a day's labour in the garden.

On leaving school, Mother went to work for Shorts Brothers – the seaplane manufacturers on the Esplanade at Rochester. She saw the famous Mercury and the Maia, where the former flew on top of the latter to enable a heavy flying boat to get airborne. I used to tease my mother that it was only when she went into aircraft design that the tide of war finally turned against the Nazis.

At this time, like most teenagers, she had a lively social life belonging to the Girl Guides and St Mary's youth club and going out with school friends at least one of whom is with us today. In some ways life was simpler. There was much less crime. Young people were freer. There were far fewer regulations. Yet society was much more protective of young people too with clear standards of behaviour expected and usually maintained. On the other hand, we must not forget that there was a war on. There were serious dangers from air raids and from the V1 and V2 flying bombs. A little while ago, I somewhat facetiously asked her if her school had offered pupils counselling when schoolmates or family members were killed. "No," she said, "We were expected just to get on with it" – which, in the end is what we all have to do, with the help of God and that of our families and friends.

After the War, Shorts moved to Belfast and Mother went to work at MacLean's Dairy at Gravesend. It was there that she met my father. He was very good at maintaining the ledgers and, at least at first, she wasn't and I think they fell in love over the arithmetic.

In due course they were married at Frindsbury Church and lived with my father's parents at Betsham, near Southfleet. Houses were in very short supply after the War, but they were able to purchase a newly built bungalow on the opposite side of the same road. I was born in 1954 and, as is sometimes customary, I was taken back to the church where my parents married in order to be christened. When Bishop Michael Turnbull baptised one of our parishioners at Frindsbury last Autumn, I was very moved to be able to tell him that I had been baptised in that very same font.

My sister Rosalind was born in 1958 and christened in our new church, Southfleet. In those days, a very lively three year old brother did not attend the ceremony. I was sent to Sunday School at the congregational chapel!

I had a good mother. She taught me to read before I went to school. She used to lug library books for all the family across the fields from Southfleet. She showed me plants and wild flowers. We used to be taken on country walks and visit friends some of whom had very interesting or quaint houses and were very kind to children. Rightly or wrongly, my mother thought I would get a better education in town than at the village school and off I went on the bus each day. Imagine a primary school age child nowadays being allowed to go to school on the bus on his own!

My mother also took us regularly to Southfleet Church. A few years ago I went to Southfleet on the Friends of Kent Churches cycle ride. I showed the person on duty where I used to sit with my mother when I was a child. She asked me why I had stopped going to Southfleet Church. I explained that I am expected to attend the church where I am rector. But I wonder how many people there are in this country who used to go to church and now no longer do? They can't all have become clergymen!

We moved to Wigmore – new home, new school, new church. When Rosalind and I were old enough, Eileen decided that she could go out to work. She applied for and obtained a job as a dinner lady at the private Bryony School in Rainham. Although not qualified, she quickly progressed to teacher. She produced some wonderful handicraft. I used to help her prepare the lessons when Religious Education meant teaching the Bible stories which underpin our Christian faith, rather than giving children a lofty overview of what other people believe. My mother had a real talent for teaching and continued at Bryony till she was almost seventy. Although they asked her to stay on, she thought she ought to retire but did help with reading at Cuxton when she first came to live with me. Mother made many friends at Bryony School and some of them have remained close up to the present.

For many years my father suffered from ill health and I know how much he appreciated the care my mother gave him. He believed that she went way beyond the call of duty in nursing him through some very difficult times.

Another of my mother's talents came to light when she joined the Townswomen's Guild Drama group at Wigmore. They put on some hilarious shows which are remembered to this day. I was usually invited to join the audience because my laugh got everybody else going.

When I became Rector of Cuxton and Halling in 1987, my whole family became involved with the life of the parish. My father died in 1993 and my mother was left alone. So, when she retired from teaching in 1998, I suggested she come to live with me. She brought the feminine touch to the Rectory, making things much more comfortable at home for me. She looked after me and I am not an easy person to look after! She also supported and assisted me in my work in the parish, taking a kind and encouraging interest in everybody associated with our congregations. I am very grateful to her for all that she has done for me.

When Eileen came to live at the Rectory, she plunged into the life of the community. She was a very sociable person and people have commented on her common sense, strong views and great sense of humour. She set to work on the Rectory garden. She joined the WI in both Cuxton and Halling. She joined our branch of the Mothers' Union, having previously been a member at Southfleet and Wigmore. She enjoyed an active and varied social life. As time went on, unfortunately, she suffered first a minor stroke and then cancer. She has battled these with amazing fortitude and determination, but they have increasingly diminished her ability to get out and do things – very frustrating for such an active person.

Eileen always took a keen interest in current affairs. When I cancelled her *Daily Express* last week, I ended a tradition which went right back to her love of Rupert the Bear when she was a little girl. How, we might ask, however, did a great newspaper whose proprietor Lord Beaverbrook was an indispensable member of Churchill's wartime cabinet, decline to its present state in which its pages are largely filled with celebrity gossip?

I cannot pass on without mentioning the holidays she loved. We had some wonderful times on family holidays when my sister and I were children. We never went very far in those days. Given that Kent has some beautiful beaches and perfect water for swimming, my father could never see the point of spending the first and last days of a holiday driving hundreds of miles across the country or enduring airport hell. Later on, however, we became more adventurous and Eileen tremendously enjoyed some marvellous cruises and seeing parts of the world she had never imagined it would one day be possible for her to visit. Occasionally she went with friends. Usually she travelled with my sister or me – never both of us, because someone had to look after the dog. Rosalind's holidays were luxuriating under the Caribbean or Mediterranean sun. Mine were travelling to Alaska or Norway to see glaciers and fjords and the midnight sun. She loved them all, as she did coming on our parish pilgrimage to Israel and Jordan.

My mother's faith was important to her. She wasn't a fanatic like me. Indeed she used to grumble sometimes that it seemed like all our social life was something to do with the Church. But daily prayer mattered to her. She was confirmed as a teenager and valued Holy Communion highly. She gave Rosalind and me a firm religious grounding. Church was an important aspect of her life, though she would never have made a show of her religion.

Mother chose the Brother James' Air, a beautiful setting of the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm which she had always enjoyed. She chose *Shine Jesus Shine* for my father's funeral and for her own and perhaps you had better have it for mine when the time comes. She believed that faith is essentially joyful. It is positive. She felt strongly that the way we present our faith has to appeal to the young. Because, quite frankly, we're losing it in this country. A couple of generations who believed you can be a Christian without going to Church have begotten a race of young people who know hardly anything of God or Jesus and have left the Church struggling to survive in a secular and multicultural society. Jesus came that we might have life. He came that we might have joy. I'm the one to put it in biblical language, but it's what my mother knew in her heart. Jesus is about life and joy and it was in this spirit that she asked that her funeral service should conclude with *You shall go out with joy*. I chose *Praise*

*My Soul*, because I like it and I think she would have approved of the sentiments. I also chose *Abide With Me* again because we had it for my father and also because the words are so marvellous. *Tears have no bitterness*.

*Tears have no bitterness* because they are the tears of love, the love we have for one another, the love of God, within which every other love subsists. As most of you know, this is a very tough time for my family, my sister being as gravely ill as my mother was. On the Sunday before my mother died, the Old Testament reading at Evensong was Ecclesiastes 3, which I chose as our first lesson this morning. I found it a very great comfort. Everything in our lives has its time and season. We don't understand. We cannot understand. But it is all in God's Hands. We are to make the best we can of our lives and to trust God. He has given us everything that we have. He has made us all that we are. He has set before us His perfect Law of Love and it is up to us to live in accordance with that Law. Psalm 90, one of the traditional funeral psalms, seems to me to suggest similar thoughts.

There are only two ways you can look at life. You can look at the world around you and think how much of it is beyond human understanding. If human beings cannot see the sense of it, you might argue, there is no sense to it. No ultimate Truth. No purpose. No final cause. No reason for everything. Such a belief appears to solve a lot of problems, but ultimately it is a counsel of despair. If there is no reason for everything, why bother at all? Why would anything matter?

Alternatively, you can look at the world around you and think how much of it is beyond human understanding and conclude that the Truth must then be very much more wonderful than we are capable of imagining. There is ultimate purpose. There is a first and final cause. There is a reason for everything. If this is your rational faith, you have a firm ground for hope and the assurance of an all embracing and eternal love. If we believe that God is the reason behind the universe, it follows that we will seek to live reasonably, to live in accordance with the Law of God, to offer *ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable holy and lively sacrifice*, in the words of the prayer book Communion service which I attended with my mother in my teens.

Our other reading I Corinthians 15<sup>20-58</sup> is the traditional reading for a funeral. I remember how comforting my grandmother found it at the funeral of her sister, my mother's Aunt Ada, which must have been in about 1976. The concept of eternal life is hard to grasp, but St Paul reminds us of Jesus and all that he accomplished through His Death and Resurrection. Paul goes on to speak about the natural world of crops growing in the earth and of the stars and planets in the heavens. These are familiar every day things, which we know well but ultimately they elude our understanding. We don't know how the crops grow or how stars are formed. The more scientists discover, the more they find that there is yet more to learn, almost infinitely more than the primitive natural philosophers of Paul's own day could possibly conceive of. These familiar and mysterious everyday phenomena, plants and animals, heavenly bodies, what we observe throughout our earthly lives, point to a much greater reality, an eternal and spiritual reality, the reality that the whole creation has its final consummation in God. Because they sang it so often in school assembly my mother got

bored with the hymn *For the Beauty of the Earth*. (I wouldn't dare suggest we sing it now.) But think about that line *Flowers of earth, buds of heaven*. If we open our eyes, the physical, temporal world around us points us to the eternal, spiritual world which is to come. If we open our eyes to see things the way they truly are, we live our lives on earth in the light of eternity.

I have spoken about how much my mother's life on earth has meant to her and to her friends and to her family. We can bear the loss, the temporary loss, because by the grace of God we can begin to see all things in the light of eternity. With St Julian of Norwich, we can trust God's promise. *All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well*. Amen.