

Funeral Sermon for + Gloria Tolopka, February 1, 2018

We are gathered in this church today to reverently and earnestly say “Eternal memory!” (Вічна пам'ять!) to a sincere Christian, a former trustee of our parish, a trusted advisor, and an active member in the life of the Church – +Gloria Tolopka. Gloria was a spirited and warm hearted woman with whom all of us can recall many shared memories of happy times. She was a constant fixture in our parish kitchen for our holiday dinners, summer picnics, and frequent fund raisers which kept Holy Family parish humming along year after year. +Gloria was someone we could depend on when we needed her. But now, God has called +Gloria and the time has come when we must go on without her.

St. Hesychius, a fifth century Presbyter of Jerusalem teaches: “The hour of death will find us, it will come, and it will be impossible to escape it.”

St. Cyril of Alexandria likewise teaches: "When the soul is separated from the body it sees the fearful, wild, merciless and fierce demons standing by. The soul of the righteous is taken by the holy angels, passed through the air, and is raised up."

Every one of us who desires to manifest his love for our sister in Christ, +Gloria, and to give her real help, can do this best of all through prayer for her today, and in the days and years to come, and particularly by taking an active part in this Divine Liturgy offered in her memory. Let us take care of those who have departed into the next world before us, by offering prayers and sacrifices for their souls. And in so doing, we are remembering part of Jesus Christ's the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

Standing at the tomb of loved ones who have passed away, we willingly or unwillingly enter in contact with the mystery of death. While looking at the lifeless body, which was abandoned by the soul, we, as faithful Christians, believe that it was abandoned only temporarily, and that at the time of the Universal Resurrection from death, the souls of faithful Christians will again be reunited with their souls.

Our earthly life is like a candle. It starts to burn at a certain point in time and at a particular point it is destined to be blown out or extinguished. One of the philosophers of the past noticed that **“life – is a long line of people, all waiting for death and not knowing who will be the next one in that line...”** We learn from Holy Scripture that life does not end with death and that death is only a transition of the soul into a different state. The Bible tells us that there exists an eternal life with God – in Paradise, but there also exists an eternal life without God – in Hell.

We pray that +Gloria has moved from death in this life to eternal life with God. We can have

a firm hope of this because +Gloria always sincerely believed in Jesus Christ. She strived to live a Catholic life and devoted her life to Christ. For the past 19 years she devotedly dedicated her life to this Church. Partly because of +Gloria's dedication we are in this new place of worship here in Lindenhurst. This parish and our parish life was a second home for +Gloria. She was here most every weekday to help in one way or another. Most importantly, she died as a faithful Catholic – after receiving Confession, Communion and the Sacrament of Holy Unction.

Our Holy Church teaches us through the words of Saint Basil the Great, in the following way: **“Whoever here, on earth, gives all his or her time to God, to that person God will later give His blessed eternity.”**

During his three year ministry on Earth, Jesus Christ taught us, when speaking of Himself: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me.” After His Passion and death on Crucifixion Friday, Jesus rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. Through Him, and only through Him, can we do the same. That's the Easter promise. So, to honor +Gloria's life and passing into eternity, there are two things which we should reflect upon and act on in her memory.

First, since “There is a time for everything, a season for every activity under heaven; a time to be born and a time to die,” and since we don't know when our own time will come, make sure the people you love know it before you go to bed tonight. Tomorrow may be too late.

Second, decide whether you wish to have a place in one of the “many mansions” in God's house, about which Jesus told his disciples in His discourse after His Last Supper. Jesus told His disciples He would soon leave them and would “prepare a place” for them.

I recommend everyone re-read or perhaps read for the first time, Chapter 14 of the Gospel of Saint John in the Douay-Rheims Bible. Among many other important things in Chapter 14, Jesus says, “I am The Way,” which means, follow my example. Jesus says, “I am The Truth,” which means, learn about Me and follow Me, because I Am Truth. And Jesus says, “I am The Life,” which means My Sacred Heart now beats in my body on Earth, which is the Church. That is where I am to be found.

We therefore gather to bid what we hope, as Christians, will be a temporary farewell to our beloved +Gloria who had given herself entirely to God right until her last breath. Let us look to +Gloria as an example of a person who makes up the Church Militant here on Earth. This means +Gloria led her life as a good Christian soldier, one who trusted in God and in His Providence, whether times were happy or sad, and who fought “the good fight,” until the

end, in order to attain her place in one of the many mansions set aside for those who love God.

Farewell to our long-standing and faithful parishioner! It was about you when the Lord said: **“Where I am, there also will be my servant”**. And that is why, while parting with you, +Gloria, we pray that the Merciful God, Our Lord, will grant peaceful rest to your immortal soul in the abodes of the righteous. We pray this now! Eternal memory to you! May God repose her soul among the Saints and Angels!

In a prayer of the Midnight Service of Saturday (which is addressed to the Savior) we pray: “Master, be merciful to me and let not my soul see the dark and gloomy sight of the evil spirits, but let bright and joyous angels receive it.”

Incline Thine ear, O Lord, unto our prayers, wherein we humbly pray Thee to show Thy mercy upon the soul of Thy servant +Gloria, whom Thou hast commanded to pass out of this world, that Thou would place her in the region of peace and light, and bid her be a partaker with Thy Saints; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lastly, I would like to express my sincere sympathy and condolences to the Oleshko Family, for all who are present here today, and who knew and loved +Gloria. May her soul rest in peace and everlasting be her memory. Amen.