

Sermon for the Christian Burial of Erdean Hannigan, 27.iii.1921-18.xii.2006  
Heffner-Oleweiler Funeral Home, Friday, 22.xii.06, 14:00  
Psalm 23, Proverbs 9:1-6

J. J.!

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was  
and Who is to come! Amen.

Hear these words from the Book of Proverbs, the 9<sup>th</sup> Chapter,  
for your remembrance, your comfort and your strength:

Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls from the highest places in the town, "You that are simple, turn in here!" To those without sense she says, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight."

'Wisdom,' that is, God's wisdom, is personified in this foremost of the wisdom books of the Bible as a woman and a homemaker. This Divine Wisdom, *Sophia* in Greek, is not only preparing a huge feast to whom all are invited; She

has built the house she calls her home. She sends out her servants, just as the LORD sends angels and human messengers, to call people from each going an individual path to joining the family of the wise as they sit down to a wonderful meal. Today we commend to God's loving and merciful care one who was the wise and welcoming soul of her family and her home.

Erdean Hannigan was one of those members of my congregation whom I met and with whom I interacted only in her home. That was not because of her infirmity, but because of that of her beloved husband, John, whose care was her primary mission as a Christian woman and wife in their last years together. John could not travel as he once had to work, to Sunday School, worship and other Church functions, except with great difficulty and where absolutely necessary to the doctor. And so it was that a part of our little Lutheran congregation gathered in the Hannigans' living

room, quite literally the 'two or three' of whom Our Lord Jesus spoke who, when gathered in His Name, might ask and receive heaven itself from His Heavenly Father's gracious hand. There we asked for and received the Word of God together, God's Word spoken down through the centuries in Sacred Scripture and God's Word made human in the very flesh and blood of the Risen Savior. It was well, I have been told by those closest to her, that I came to know Erdean in that context, in her home, with her partner in marriage and family, showing simple hospitality to a guest for the sake of the One Who had sent that guest to her.

There, those who knew her all their lives say, and I can attest, that she was supremely happy and content with her family gathered around her or hosting trusted friends. One clue to her cordiality was the almost deafening cheerfulness with which she always answered the phone when I called to make an appointment for a visit. She

delighted in the routine of shopping, a family outing made possible by her daughter, and seemed more amused than irritated when I forgot which day that was. I still cannot remember whether it was Tuesdays or Thursdays. Up until the time of John's death, Erdean transformed the living room, which was also John's bedroom, into a gracious parlor for receiving guests with an array of family photos facing the visitor, loved ones who could be brought into the conversation. Erdean was always careful to show consideration toward John by making sure that he received a shouted summary of what had just been said, provided it was important enough to bear repeating. It was then the most natural thing in the world to enter with John and Erdeen into the words of the Sacred Liturgy abbreviated for those who live in special circumstances such as theirs, to recite with them the Lord's Prayer and to receive into our

bodies and spirits the very life of the Crucified and Risen Savior.

We talked about so many things in those visits. Erdean was a keen follower of news events at home and abroad. She was not an opinionated person, but she did hold well-considered views which she expressed intelligently and with an openness to the other's insight. One point on which I think we differed was the present war, and I have come to see that Erdean was wiser than many a high official in our land, wiser than me and most perhaps in her instinct for peace and forgiveness. Other than a succinct update on the latest assessment or treatment of John's condition, and apart from a genuine concern for her visitor's health and well-being, she rarely discussed illness and never dwelt on personal misfortune, disappointment or tragedy. Her great granddaughters and the faithful kindness of her daughter and granddaughter brought her too much joy for that. Erdean

did not, as so many do, revert to a kind of childishness in her old age. Instead, she continued to mature in wisdom, a vintage wine mixed with a certain zany humor I suspect had been her gift from the very beginning.

I had known Erdean in this way for over two years when, late on a wintry Friday afternoon, Erdean told me of the great tragedy that marked her life with John, a life-changing event that had occurred on just such a Friday afternoon long ago. The loss of her son and daughter-in-law was not something she had intended to tell me at some point in the course of time, after other topics of conversation had been exhausted. Erdean might not ever have told me of her own loss and sorrow had it not been for my own. It was her way of reaching out to me both as a sister in Christ and as a parent who had lost a child and one she loved as her own child. That retelling was painful for her and

brought tears. For me, it was a profound experience of compassion and empathy in the fullest sense.

So, now, all is complete and all is prepared for us. Erdean, in her loving wisdom, has spent a lifetime preparing a feast of good things to which both family, like you, and strangers, like me, are invited. That table is set with the grace of God which nourished her, with that wisdom for living in confidence and for dying in hope that is ours in the Wisdom of God born at Bethlehem, completed on Calvary and Risen to welcome Erdean and all to His great feast before the Father's throne which shall have no end. ✠ Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Our LORD.

✠ Amen.

**S. D. G. !**