

**HOMILY DELIVERED AT THE MEMORIAL SERVICES FOR
SENATOR THOMAS F. EAGLETON¹**

LAWRENCE BIONDI, S.J.*

Death is a strange thing. It is one of the most important events in our life, but it is one that we rarely think about. The death of someone whom we love comes like a great sacrament, an outward sign of our relationship with God and with others, and death helps us to better understand who we are, what we are, and where we are going.

This morning we gather to celebrate the life of Senator Tom Eagleton, beloved husband, father and grandfather, cherished friend, respected leader, and a true visionary. When death comes to someone we love, we remember that person more clearly. We remember Tom's genuine kindness, his heartfelt generosity, his hardy laughter, yes even his eccentricities and his sense of humor.

And thinking of him, we think of others who have passed our way, members of our families and our friends who have deeply enriched our lives. Persons, like Tom, of courage, of generosity, of commitment and who now belong to the past, and yet who still remain with us, and to whom we owe so much.

The death of a single person whom we love makes us realize the profound significance of the Christian message, that ultimately our happiness lies in loving one another as God loves us.

The sacrament of death brings another blessing. Like nothing else, it reminds us that our lives here on earth are very brief—like the falling shadow or the rustling of wind through the trees. We are all here for only a little while.

This should not discourage, dishearten nor depress us. It did not discourage or deter Tom Eagleton from living his life to the very fullest. Rather, it makes us realize that life is very precious, and that each day is a gift and an occasion when we can show our love for others. This is the way Tom loved life. This is the way Tom lived life, believing in God's gifts, believing in the promises of God's own Good News.

1. Delivered by Saint Louis University President Lawrence Biondi, S.J., on March 10, 2007 at Saint Francis Xavier College Church, Saint Louis University, Saint Louis, Missouri.

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It is particularly important on a occasion like today—when we come to this Church burdened by loss and by sorrow—that we remain true to the message of that Good News, recognizing how Tom himself tried to live his life according to its promises.

- Clearly, that Good News did not promise Tom, and does not promise us, that if we only “believe”—in God, in the goodness of creation, in the value of all persons—that we will be spared difficulties in life.
- Nor does it promise that just because we strive—as Tom Eagleton did, often at great personal cost—to create families, nations, and a world that are more loving, more just, more peaceful, and more life-giving, that others will always cooperate with these good efforts.
- And it does *not* promise that we will be spared any of the experiences of our own humanity, including misunderstanding and sorrow, sickness and pain, and eventually death.

Tom Eagleton did not root his life in empty promises. He *did* root his life, his hopes, his dreams, and his human efforts in what the Lord truly *does* promise:

- For the Good News *does* promise that in spite of life’s burdens, we will never be alone, and that God will always be with us as a source of guidance and strength, no matter what.
- It *does* promise us that nothing—no hardship, no infirmity, no failure—nothing—can separate us from the love of God.
- And, it *does* promise us that death will never have the final word, that there is life beyond death, and that one day we will be again in the presence of those who have gone before us.

The Good News is indeed good. Its promises could not be more trustworthy.

Today we thank God for the life of Senator Thomas Eagleton who believed in those promises, and who through a life of public service strived to feed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, and gave companionship to the lonely. We thank God for him, and we prayerfully and lovingly commend him to God’s merciful love.