



Obituary for Teresa Chepaitis

Teresa Ranalli Chepaitis died December 4, 2009, at Pine Haven Nursing Home. Born January 31, 1921, in Wappingers Falls, NY, she was the daughter of the late Donato and Teresa (DeRosa) Ranalli. She had a large family who raised her lovingly, including the late Alfonso and Mary Campilii, and Henry and Angelina Campilii. Her cousins who were raised with her include Delfina (Campilii) Craft, Linda (Campilii) Giancarlo, Rudy Campilii, and the late Sam Campilii. She considered them her brothers and sisters.

Teresa earned her master's degree in education through SUNY, New Paltz and went on to teach both at St. Mary's Academy in Hudson, NY and in the Hudson City school district for many years. She married Stanley Chepaitis and raised her family of five children in Hudson. Her gifts of storytelling and singing will be remembered by her family and by many people in the community whose lives she touched, including the caring staff at Pine Haven. She will be greatly missed.

She was predeceased by her husband Stanley and an infant daughter, Margaret. She is survived by her sons, Fr. Peter Chepaitis, OFM and Dr. Stanley Chepaitis (Swana); her daughters, Marita Casey-Russo (Rodney), Norma Shook (David), and Dr. Barbara Chepaitis (Steve Sawicki); seven grandchildren, Sean and Margaret Casey, Mark and Anthony Shook, Matthew Koskowski, Stella and Nicholas Chepaitis; and special family friend Sister Anna Tantsits, IHM.

Readings for Teresa's Funeral Mass

A Reading from the Book of Proverbs (Sean Casey - grandson)

Listen, my children, to a parent's instruction;
Pay attention, that you may gain understanding!
What I am commending to you is sound teaching,
Do not discard it.

I too, was once a child with a father,
In my mother's eyes a tender child, unique.
This was what [she] used to teach me,
"Let your heart treasure what I have to say,
Keep my principles and you shall live;
Get wisdom, get understanding!

Do not forget or turn aside from my words.
Do not desert Wisdom, she will keep you safe,
Love her, she will watch over you.
Wisdom is the principle thing; therefore get Wisdom;
At the cost of all you have, get understanding.
Love Wisdom and she shall exalt you;
Embrace Wisdom, and she shall honor you.
She shall put upon your head an ornament of grace;
A crown of glory shall she bestow upon you.

The Word of the Lord [Proverbs 4:1-9]

Responsorial Psalm [Psalm 126] (Barbara Chepaitis – Teresa's daughter & her son– Matthew)

Antiphon: [Peter] □ *God has done great things for us, filled us with laughter & music.* □

[Barbara] *When the Lord brought back the captives of Zion,*
It seemed like a dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter, And our tongue with rejoicing.

[Matthew] Then they said among the nations,
"the Lord has done great things for them."
The Lord has done great things for us; We are glad indeed.

Antiphon: [Peter] □ *God has done great things for us, filled us with laughter & music.* □

[Barbara] *Restore our fortunes, O Lord,*
Like the torrents in the southern desert.
Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing.

[Matthew] Although they go forth weeping,
Carrying the seed to be sown,
They shall come back rejoicing,
Carrying their sheaves.

Antiphon: [Peter] □ *God has done great things for us, filled us with laughter & music.* □

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles (Sr. Anna)

The apostles returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet.
Entering the city, they went to the upper room where they were staying ...
Together they devoted themselves to constant prayer.
There were some women in their company,
and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his relatives.
When the day of Pentecost came it found them gathered in one place.
Suddenly from up in the sky
There came a noise like a strong, driving wind
Which was heard all through the house where they were seated.
Tongues as of fire appeared,
which parted and came to rest on each of them.
All were filled with the Holy Spirit.
They began to express themselves in foreign tongues
and make bold proclamation as the Spirit prompted them.

The Word of the Lord [Acts 1:12-14, 2:1-4]

Alleluia verse: (Sr. Anna)

♪ Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia,
I am the resurrection, / I am the life, says the Lord.
If you trust in me, / you will have eternal life.

Gospel: (Peter)

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark

People were bringing their little children to Jesus, to have him touch them,
but the disciples scolded the people.
When Jesus noticed this, he was angry and said to his disciples,
"Let the children come to me and do not stop them;
for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.
I tell you solemnly, anyone
who does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child
will never enter it."

Then he took the children in his arms,
placed his hands on each of them and blessed them.

The Gospel of the Lord [Mark 10:13-16]

Funeral Homily for Teresa Chepaitis, December 11, 2009

□ ***God has done great things for us, filled us with laughter and music.***

We proclaimed to the nations what God has done for us;
Your mighty deeds of love, restoring us to life.
You lead your people home to you rejoicing. □

My sisters and I chose that psalm because God has done great things for us through the love, faith and bold truth we experienced from our mother, Teresa. Among the greatest of her gifts to us were laughter and music.

She believed that Christ would lead her home, and she was ready to go and be with her husband, Stan and her own mothers and fathers. She trusted that her death would not be the end of her life, but the beginning of a new stage of life.

At her bedside, as we waited for her to cross over, we cried, and we laughed and we sang songs she had taught us. One of them was from Porgy and Bess, □ "It ain't necessarily so, it ain't necessarily so. The things that you're liable to read in the Bible, it ain't necessarily so." □

I anointed her, we prayed, we thanked her for her life and the many gifts she had given to us, and to many others. We sang the Salve Regina in Latin after we said it in English as the prayer, "Hail, Holy Queen." We told each other stories of her life. The staff at Pine Haven had laughed with her when she entertained them in the middle of the night, and those who were on duty cried at her death, along with us.

Mom was not pious, in an outward way, she had no patience for shallow religion, but she was full of faith & love. Just a few weeks before she died, I gave her communion. She was suffering from dementia, but was very much in the present when we prayed the familiar prayers. After she received a piece of the host, I offered her some water from a plastic cup, and she said, "Oh, can I drink from the chalice?"

She believed in the promise Jesus gave to Martha, when he said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will have eternal life." Sr. Anna sang that Scripture as the Alleluia verse. Mom had said to me often over the years, "I'm not afraid of death, it's the process of dying I don't like." The very week she died, she said, "I feel like I'm going to die, but it's OK, the Holy Spirit is with me."

It was those words and her devotion to Mary that led us to choose the reading from Acts about the coming of the Holy Spirit and the hymns we are singing today. Her life was a witness to love and faith to us.

As I read over some of the letters she had sent me - and there were a lot of them - I was struck by how many times she wrote "your mother loves you" and how many times she sent me to others to minister to them.

She loved the color **red**, and she was a witness to her faith by the way she lived her life. I remember especially the year she took care of my father after he had a stroke. That's why I am wearing a red stole today. The word for "witness" in Greek is martyr.

Teresa was a teacher down to her toes. After retiring from full time teaching, she was often called in as a substitute. And there are stories of how she could control the most difficult class with a silent stare. I can hear her saying some of the words of the first reading, from the Book of Proverbs,
"Let your heart treasure what I have to say, Keep my principles and you shall live; Get *wisdom*, get understanding!"

And we listened to her and to our dad. Her grandchildren who called her Mimi or Dottie were the recipients of much of her wisdom whether they wanted it or not.

In different ways, we, her children, all became teachers like Mom. My sister, Marita, was a teacher in the Greenport and Hudson schools, and now her former students bring their children to get their picture taken with her at Halloween. My brother Stanley, Dr. Chepaitis, teaches music and life, and how to grow organic food. My sister, Norma, teaches people how to get through the health care system and come out alive. My sister, Barbara, another Dr. Chepaitis, teaches through her writing, poetry and storytelling.

I seem to have forgotten someone. Oh yes, it's me. I became a teacher as a priest and a friar, and even spent a few years in the classroom.

But Mom never let us get puffed up about our achievements. She used to tell me, "You sing like Pavarotti, and you eat like him too. Lose some weight. Get a haircut."

I think the greatest Gospel lesson we all learned from Teresa's life was the one described in today's Gospel reading when Jesus says, "let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them." She was always about reaching out to children, her own, her grandchildren, and the children she taught.

She ate very small meals, but always brought more food than she would eat when she substituted at John L. Edwards [the local public elementary school]. There would always be a child who would benefit from the extra sandwich or cookies she brought for lunch.

I remember a time when I was in seminary in Washington DC. I had sent her a letter with a photo of me in my habit surrounded by 8-10 year old boys at a facility for dependent children, a kind of orphanage, called Junior Village. They were all African-American. She wrote back to me about how she was subbing for a class that was made up of mostly black children. They gathered around her desk at lunch time, and saw the picture as she opened her mail. One of them asked, "Mrs. Chepaitis, is that your son?" "Yes" she said. "Those his kids?" She told me her answer, "I proceeded to tell them how we are all God's children, and I didn't care what the Supreme Court said about church & state."

We learned that *Good News* from her life and her letters. We learned about how we are all *God's* children. We learned how to follow *God's* way; how to live the truth in love, how to love in deed and truth and not just talk about it, but we were never forced to do it the way she would have done it.

We learned how to let the little ones, the ones others rejected or ignored or condemned, come to us the way Jesus did. We were never afraid to bring anyone home for Thanksgiving or Christmas. And my nephews and nieces picked that up. They began to bring their friends to family meals, especially those that had nowhere else to go on holidays.

You who have come to remember our mother Teresa, Terry, to some of you, to pray for her and for each other, and to express your love, faith, and hope, thank you for your presence, your stories, your laughter, your tears.

Remember that we are all children of the same *God*. And don't forget to bring an extra sandwich. I can hear my mother saying what St. Francis said at the end of his life. "I have done what was mine to do. May Christ teach you what is yours."

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