

HOMILY: FUNERAL MASS FOR DOREEN FERNANDEZ

July 5, 2002, Cultural Center of the Philippines
Kritika Kultura, <http://www.ateneo.edu/kritikakultura/>

“**T**he Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Beloved family and friends of Doreen, dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On Tuesday last week I was told that Doreen had passed away, and since then I have been haunted by that passage from the Book of Job in slightly altered form, “The Lord gave us Doreen, and the Lord has taken her away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

For all of us who are gathered here this afternoon and for many more who are not here with us, Doreen was a precious, irreplaceable gift from the Lord.

She was a gift to her family. As daughter, sister, aunt, wife, and foster mother, she was an embodiment of devotion: loving, caring, affirming, helping, and encouraging. She was loveable and she was loved.

She was a gift to the schools where she taught: St. Scholastica’s College, where she graduated from high school and college, and where she began her career as a teacher, and the Ateneo de Manila University, where she taught for close to thirty years. There she handled a wide range of subjects, then undertook research, became an administrator, and with all these, continued to teach.

In an interview she said, “I think I am basically a teacher. Basically, completely, and thoroughly a teacher.” And what a great teacher she was. In 1998 she was one of the twelve Outstanding Teachers of the Philippines named by the Metrobank Foundation. But

Doreen was not only an outstanding teacher; she was outstanding in many other ways. She was, to quote Belinda Aquino, "...writer, editor, critic, mentor, speaker, lecturer, expert, judge of various contests, board trustee or director, cultural icon, literary figure, and more."

She was a gift to writers: the young, budding, struggling writers whose talent she recognized and whom she led towards excellence and renown, and the venerated elders whose distinguished history she lovingly recorded.

She was a gift to her friends and it's amazing that she could make so many feel so special. One of them wrote: "I feel so fortunate to have met you! You shine with so much great goodness, modesty and intelligence... Of all my Filipino friends, you are the Friend I Most Want To Keep." Those words came from Jose Garcia Villa.

Doreen was a gift to Filipino culture. She was an indefatigable, constantly exploring scholar. She wrote books, papers, and articles on literature, theatre, education, and of course, food. She was the editor of and one of the major contributors to the volume on theatre of the Encyclopedia of Philippine Art published by the Cultural Center of the Philippines. For her outstanding contribution to the development of Filipino culture in the twentieth century, she was named one of the 100 recipients of the Centennial Honors for the Arts conferred by the CCP in 1999.

Doreen was an immensely gifted and totally committed person, yet she was modest, gracious, amiable, good-humored, and dependable. She was, to use what might be a contradiction in terms, an even-tempered genius, with no trace of eccentricity or egotism. A wonder that she could be so cheerful in spite of all she suffered – diabetes, the effects of a kidney transplant, and virus infections.

We are told that illness and advancing years are the time when God takes back little by little the gifts that he has given us – good health, abundant energy, and even memory. Yet in her last years, Doreen continued to produce. Her last published book was *Palayok*, a work of scholarship and a work of art, and her last word on Filipino food. Early this year she began work on a book on architect and interior designer Wili Fernandez, her devoted husband and her guru in gastronomy. Doreen acknowledged that Wili was the master and she the disciple. But in this case the disciple became greater than the master.

The Lord gave us Doreen, and the Lord has taken her away, not to deprive her of the blessing of life but to give it to her in its fullness and splendor. Holy Scripture tells us that what appears as death is really the passage to eternal peace. Since in Baptism we share in the death of Christ, we shall also share in the glory of his resurrection. And because we believe in Christ as Lord and Savior, we shall, by the power of his dying and rising, conquer death. For Doreen, God's promise of eternal life has now been fulfilled.

In her last moments Doreen humbly surrendered herself to the Lord. She knew she was dying, and she was prepared for it. Like the servant in the parable, she had been given five talents, and at the final accounting, she gave back ten talents.

She was God's gift to us, and because she willingly gave herself back to him, we too should give her back to God in faith and love. As we celebrate this Eucharist for her, let us thank the Lord for the gift that she was to all of us, and let us offer her now as our gift to God, a gift most precious and pleasing to him, the gift of a complete life, rich in beauty and joy and honor and wisdom.

"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."