

Eulogy for Mother Lucy Poole

Born February 15, 1909

Died August 4, 2007

Father Doyle, Father Jonathan, Good Sisters of the community of St. Dominic, family and friends,

It is an honour and a privilege for me to speak on behalf of the family in praise of Mother Poole, our Lucy, our mum.

First of all, we salute you, Father Doyle, Father Jonathan and, above all, the Community of Sisters of the Church of the Immaculate Conception and St. Dominic here in Stone. You provided Mother Poole with a home-from-home during the many years she spent in the parish and as a member of the Third Order of St. Dominic. As a Tertiary Sister of the Dominican Order, she took on the name in religion of Martin de Porres, the simplest of saints whose life mum did her best to emulate.

As Father Doyle said in his beautiful homily, Lucy “was a good woman who did good things.” Every day, her whole life long, through prayer and self-discipline, she renewed her dedication to serving God and loving those around her. Even when she was already elderly, she faithfully took as her charitable mission the care of several old folks in Stone.

My brothers and sisters and family friends have told me some of their thoughts about Lucy, and I’m happy to have this opportunity to share them with you all.

Lucy was a fount of wisdom whose advice was always sound because it came from a loving heart and from a wealth of experience gained in the course of life’s ups and downs. When you confided in her, the secret stayed locked in her heart. Her discretion was absolute. Indeed, sometimes it was frustrating because she wouldn’t tell you all the scuttlebutt that you’d heard second-hand from someone else and you were dying to know if it was true. She takes all her secrets with her to the grave.

Her faith in God was unwavering and unshakeable. I’ll never forget, one day, sitting down with mum and having the temerity to start what I thought was a clever debate over matters related to the meaning of life. She cut me off and told me she didn’t want to talk about it. “I know what I believe,” she said “and that’s enough for me.”

Mum’s memory was legendary. You could sit with her for hours, as some of us did on several occasions, and she would provide answers to all our questions about the family, going way back into the 19th century, from well before she was born. The day before she died, she was visited in hospital by grandson Bernard Prendergast. Unprompted, she congratulated him on his new posting to Oxford. Then, out of the blue, she said: “You know, Bernard, your great-great-grandfather was born in Oxford.”

Through all her pain and suffering in the final days of her life, Lucy tried so hard to set aside her own discomfort and concentrate on you. Visitors always felt they had her complete attention and she always had something kind, and something wise, to say. Compassion and empathy were her stock-in-trade, even when she was the one doing all the suffering.

Heaven only knows how many greetings cards she sent in the course of her life. She never forgot anyone on any occasion, even when her brood grew to the size of a small army. And she didn’t just send a card with a token few words and a signature. It’d usually be accompanied by a hand-written note that showed her deep and genuine interest in your life.

Lucy wasn’t perfect, of course, but she was pretty darned exceptionally good and kind.

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She loved to read. She was avidly interested in everything and anything. Chatting with her was the easiest thing in the world because she was never bored, even when you were boring. This was because she was a great listener and enjoyed the back and forth of everyday conversation, quite naturally, and without artifice, steering a conversation into areas of mutual interest. She'd make any conversation interesting by adding her own nuggets of information sifted on the fly from her mountainous store of knowledge.

She loved to play Scrabble, of course, and for years she did the crossword in the Daily Telegraph. She kept her brain active, which perhaps is why her mind was still sparkling and lucid until the day she died.

Lucy was an exemplar of the dictum: "You don't slow down as you grow old, you grow old as you slow down." Whether in the swirling hubbub of life going on around her or in the stillness of quiet contemplation, she was always, always actively engaged in her world.



She obviously loved children and was easy to amuse. Sometimes, when you got her going, she'd be laughing so hard that tears would be streaming down her cheeks. Her smile, like all smiles, was infectious, even contagious, and above all genuine. Imelda likes to tell the story of how she remembered our mum in her very late years when they would go for a walk together through

Stone. Mum was greeted by so many friends as they strolled along down the high street arm-in-arm. Mum said very little but her smile was such a human, beautiful connection filled with warmth and kindness.

Lucy was a gem of a woman, full of life. I think I can safely say, on behalf of you all, that we loved you very, very much, dearest Lucy, and you loved us even more.

Imelda and I stayed with Lucy the night before she died. She'd slept like a baby through the night. Then, in the early morning, not long after sunlight began streaming into her hospital room, she woke up and lay uneasily for about an hour while Imelda and I, on either side of the bed, held her by the hand. We prayed together, for her and with her; she was still very much aware of our presence at her side.

After a while mum said her last words. "I'll be alright," she said. "I'll be alright." She wasn't speaking to anyone in particular. Her eyes were closed. It was more like she was speaking to herself, begging her body to release her from pain and suffering, begging her body to let her go to God.

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Quite suddenly, her body gave up the struggle and mum settled into a stillness, her eyes open now, her face almost radiant and at peace. It seemed to me she might be experiencing some kind of ecstasy. Who knows? But for all the world, it looked like she might already be seeing the face of God.

I felt so happy for mum because she was finally free of pain. About 15 minutes later, she quietly passed away and we said goodbye. Shakespeare's beautiful words on the death of Hamlet came to my mind: "Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet princess, and may flights of angels sing thee to thy rest." Like a pure white dove, Lucy's soul fluttered peacefully up and away into eternity.

But her spirit stays with us, doesn't it? When we leave this church today and return to our homes to live out the rest of our lives, we take with us the spirit of gentle Lucy.

When we hear the sound of laughter, or the sound of silence which mum loved so much; when we take in a beautiful landscape, a beautiful garden, a beautiful sunset, a beautiful face, a beautiful smile; when we relish the aroma of good cooking, or the smell of freshly mown grass; when we feel on our cheeks the whispered kiss of a soft, summer breeze, it'll be gentle Lucy passing by, reminding us to be good, reminding us to be kind, reminding us to spread the sunshine of our smile everywhere we go, just as she did every day of her beautiful life.