

Country mourns loss of Jacqueline Onassis

ARLINGTON, Va. (CNS) — At a service presided over by retired Archbishop Philip M. Hannan of New Orleans, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis was laid to rest beside her first husband, President John F. Kennedy, at Arlington National Cemetery May 23.

Burial of the former first lady, who died May 19 of lymphatic cancer, followed a funeral Mass for her in New York. She was 64.

"We are gathered here to pray for, to pay our respects to, and to share our sorrow for Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, so dearly beloved, so sorely missed," said the archbishop, who in 1963 as a Washington auxiliary bishop had delivered the homily at the funeral Mass for the slain president.

"There's an old saying in the church that for those who die in the faith of Christ, a funeral is as much consolation of the living as it is for the comfort of the deceased. So in this hour of parting, let us remember the everlasting dawn of God's presence in heaven as we pray for Jacqueline and for ourselves."

The archbishop introduced President Clinton, who said, "God gave her the very great gifts and imposed upon her great burdens. She bore them all with dignity and grace and uncommon common sense."

"We say goodbye to Jackie," he added. "May the flame she lit so long ago burn ever brighter here and always brighter in our hearts."

Mrs. Onassis' son, John F. Kennedy Jr., read a passage from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. It begins, "But I would not have you be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep," and ends with, "Comfort one another with these words."

Her daughter, Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg, read the responsorial psalm, whose antiphon was "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains."

Archbishop Hannan led the recitation of the Lord's Prayer with those gathered at the grave site.

"In the ancient cemeteries of the Christians in Rome, called catacombs, the inscription on the tomb showed their belief," said the archbishop. "Generally, they inscribed just the name of the deceased person, with the words, 'Dies Natales in Domino,' that is, 'birthday in the Lord,' then after that simply the date of death of the person, not the date of birth in this life."

"And so for us, May the 19th was the birthday in the Lord of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis."

After a closing prayer by the archbishop, the U.S. Navy Band Sea Chanters ended the service with the hymn "Eternal Father, Strong to Save."



Wide World Photos
Then-U.S. Sen. John F. Kennedy and his fiancée, Jacqueline Bouvier, chat at the Kennedy residence in Hyannis, Mass., in 1953. Mrs. Onassis, who charmed the nation with her style and calmed it with her strength, died on May 19, 1994, at her home in New York City.

Afterward, Mrs. Onassis' children knelt before the casket to kiss it and offer their final prayers. They were joined by Archbishop Hannan in leading the procession from the grave site.

In 1963, then-Bishop Hannan also presided at the burial of the two Kennedy children — Patrick, who died three days after his birth in August 1963, and an unnamed daughter, who was stillborn in 1956 — alongside their father. And in 1968, he returned again to Washington, then as New Orleans archbishop, to deliver the graveside eulogy at the funeral for Robert F. Kennedy, who lies a few paces away from his brother.

The words "dignity" and "grace" followed the former first lady in death as they followed her in life.

She had received the sacraments of reconciliation and of the sick May 19, from Monsignor George Bardes of St. Thomas More Church in her New York home. She had left the hospital the previous day, halting treatment there for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

As much as she was characterized by her vivaciousness during her tenure as first lady, she was characterized even more by her poise and calm in the wake of the assassination of her first husband, President John F. Kennedy, in 1963.

Politicians and former first ladies alike heaped posthumous praise for how she bore up after the assassination.

For more than half of her life, Mrs. Onassis was the subject of intense public fascination, starting in 1961 when

she became first lady at the age of 31, although she routinely tried her best to shun the spotlight.

Born Jacqueline Lee Bouvier on July 28, 1929, into a wealthy family, she was reportedly devastated when her Catholic parents divorced.

After becoming debutante of the year in Newport, R.I., in 1947, she moved to Washington, where she received a bachelor's degree from George Washington University in 1951.

The next year, she took a job with the old *Washington Times-Herald* as a photographer and met young Sen. John Kennedy. They were married that September. Kennedy's father, family scion Joseph P. Kennedy, reportedly approved of the marriage because of her social background and the fact Jackie, too, was Catholic.

Although she was said to not care about politics, she helped Kennedy's political ambitions by appearing with him at events, although she declined to make speeches for him.

She blossomed after his election in 1960, and as first lady oversaw a redecoration of the White House and dug into social concerns with a passion not seen since Eleanor Roosevelt's time.

More than 30 years later images remain transfixed in the American con-

sciousness of Mrs. Kennedy scrambling onto the trunk of the presidential limousine in Dallas to get help for her mortally wounded husband. Hours later, in her blood-spattered outfit, she stood next to Lyndon B. Johnson as he took the oath of office inside an airplane.

She presented a profile of courage during the days of national mourning for the slain president.

At the funeral, flanked by Caroline and John Jr., her young children, Mrs. Kennedy "became a symbol, for all of us, of great nobility and character in an age of general impoverishment of soul," said a former Kennedy aide.

Archbishop Hannan said the former first lady was always surprised "at the praise she got for maintaining her composure, because she always felt she could meet any situation."

He also recalled that while he was in Washington, Mrs. Kennedy came to him, "anxious to have Caroline taught her religion by a sister. She said, 'I never had an opportunity myself as a child to know a sister or profit from sisters and I think it would be very good for Caroline.'"

He arranged for a nun from The Catholic University of America to teach Caroline and other children of White House staff in a class held at Visitation Convent in Georgetown.

"I found her (Mrs. Kennedy) to be a very gracious person, a nice personality, easy to talk to and easy to get along with," he told Catholic News Service.

Lady Bird Johnson, widow of President Johnson, said in a statement, "In times of hope, she captured our hearts. In tragedy, her courage helped save a nation's grief."

Mrs. Kennedy knew grief well. One son, Patrick, died soon after birth. She also had one stillbirth and one miscarriage. Her brother-in-law, Robert F. Kennedy, was also assassinated in 1968.

After nearly five years of widowhood, she stunned the world in 1968 by marrying Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis.

Gossip swirled in the press about her marital intentions, her spending habits and the couple's relationship. They separated but never divorced. When he died in 1975, she used the help of Kennedy family lawyers to receive a larger share of his estate than his heiress-daughter, Christina Onassis, believed was due her.

Contributing to this story was Mark Patison in Washington.

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