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## Mass of Christian Burial for the Honorable William Hughes Mulligan May 17, 1996, St. Joseph's Church, Bronxville, NY

Cardinal John O'Connor

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**Mass of Christian Burial for the Honorable William Hughes Mulligan May 17,  
1996, St. Joseph's Church, Bronxville, NY**

**Cover Page Footnote**  
Archbishop of New York

**MASS OF CHRISTIAN BURIAL  
FOR THE HONORABLE  
WILLIAM HUGHES MULLIGAN  
MAY 17, 1996, ST. JOSEPH'S CHURCH,  
BRONXVILLE, NY**

*His Eminence John Cardinal O'Connor\**

During the course of the past few days, as happens frequently on the occasion of a death in the family, there was a bit of confusion about who was to be the preacher today. It turns out to be unimportant in terms of who is standing in this pulpit because the real preacher today is Judge William Hughes Mulligan. Judge Mulligan's entire life, as many here know, was a dynamic, powerful sermon.

But Bill preached in another way, as well. He was known all over the country, and certainly here in New York, as one of the great after-dinner speakers. He was hilarious in many of his addresses, yet remarkably subtle, never blunt, never offensive, he was always preaching. He was always giving a message. Most particularly, he gave a reminder, a call to humility.

I thought that you would perhaps forgive me, therefore, if this morning I called upon the Judge to speak for himself to a significant degree by quoting ever so briefly from two of his more famous addresses to the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick where he was always in his glory. I do not do this simply as a tribute to him, or to reminisce, or even merely to lighten the heaviness of heart which some may experience, including myself. I do so because as humorous, as whimsical, as fantastic as some of his addresses were, they reveal that which seems to be his dominant overwhelming characteristic, the one quality that stood out more than any other: his *authenticity*. Bill Mulligan never forgot who he was. This I found to be his important strength. He never seemed to take himself too seriously. He never took too seriously his position or the fame that he accrued. Most particularly, he never let Irishmen become pretentious.

His speeches were always an ever-so-subtle psychological, sociological, moral, ethical analyses of the status quo—of who we are and where we are in our lives and more importantly of who we should be, where we should be and most importantly who it is that God wants us to be and where God wants us to be at any given point in our lives.

This is vintage Judge William Hughes Mulligan, from one of his two most famous speeches:

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\* Archbishop of New York

A few years ago when I was in Ireland, I visited the ancient port city of Galway where I was assured by a local that Christopher Columbus had stopped there to bring on board an Irish navigator, who actually guided him to the New World.

Friendly Sons and friends, I am not only suggesting but I think the facts clearly establish that in reality Columbus was Lynch—or Lynch was Columbus—whichever way you want it. There is even further evidence—Morison, who claims that Columbus was born in Genoa, admits that Columbus could not read or write Italian—neither could Lynch. Morison . . . further states that Columbus spoke Spanish with a Portuguese accent. Actually, of course, it was Irish he spoke, and isn't it a mark of Lynch's great leadership and seamanship that he could make the Mediterranean crew understand his orders, even though they were given in Gaelic.

And this for you gentlemen of the Court, he said to the Friendly Sons:

Gentlemen, we have convicted men of serious crimes in the Federal Court on less evidence than we have here—and my Court has affirmed them. Lest our Italian friends and Mediterranean co-religionists take offense, I assure them that I intend no disrespect at all, and on October 12th, I will attend the annual Lynch Day parade, at Lynch Circle and watch with pride as the Knights of Lynch pass by.

In another, not quite so well-known but equally provocative speech—and I use that word deliberately—he tells us:

The Pyramids still stand, a tribute to Irish engineering skill—in fact after the Irish left the Egyptians built very little over two stories high. . . .

Among the itinerant workers was Timothy Hanlon, and unemployed bricklayer, who soon became a foreman on the job. It is not at all unreasonable to imagine that the Pharaohs' daughter, coming out to visit the job site, would fall in love with Tim. Except for the ugly ones, the Irish are the most handsome people on earth.

After a whirlwind courtship, Tim married the Princess and became King when the Pharaohs died of a heart attack—undoubtedly overcome by joy his daughter had married so well. . . .

The Egyptians at that time spoke pre-Coptic Egyptian and Tim, of course, spoke Gaelic. Although it is admittedly difficult to find modern philologists skilled in both ancient tongues, in fact, Timothy Hanlon, in the mouth of an Egyptian, translates freely into Tutankamen [or King Tut]. . . .

That was the address that Judge Mulligan gave when there was a big hullabaloo at the Metropolitan over the artifacts from King Tut's tomb.

But these funny, whimsical, fancies, it seems to me, were always the Judge's way of reminding us that we can become so very, very pompous. It was his way of telling all of us how easily we can become social climbers, forget our roots and with them our fundamental val-

ues. We can indeed, he seemed to be saying, sell our souls: Irish, Italian, German, whatever.

Listen carefully to other portions of his Columbus-Lynch, King Tut-Timothy Hanlon talks to the Friendly Sons. I think this becomes clear.

Although I have visited Ireland many times, I cannot reminisce as a native about growing up in a thatched roof cottage warmed by a pleasant peat fire. I grew up not in Cork or Kerry, but in the Bronx. Not in a cottage, but an apartment house, which I now understand is properly referred to as a townhouse. Our heat was steam and not peat, and we had it when the boiler was working and the Super was sober, conditions which seldom coincided.

We have heard many stories of the cruelty and inhumanity of the absentee English landlords in their dealings with their Irish tenants. I am unmoved. I can assure you that the landlords we had in the Bronx were at least as ferocious. My mother was forced to learn more Landlord and Tenant Law than that known to all of the Municipal Court Judges in the Bronx put together.

My mother's maiden name was Donahue and her mother's . . . maiden name was Scriven. . . . I was told that my grandmother had a brother named Samuel [Scriven]. . . .

On my first trip to Ireland, I met Sam Scriven at a local pub. He took me to the alleged family homestead, a magnificent castle of concrete block with a rusted tin roof, surrounded by mud. The drawbridge must have rotted away.

He even showed me my granduncle's unmarked grave in the cemetery in Macroom. There must have been several changes in the management of the church, since in the graveyard the Catholics were on one side and the Protestants on the other. Sam was almost in the middle. . . .

When I related all of this to my mother on my return, she told me that my grandmother had gone to Uncle Sam's funeral in New York, and that he was now resting peacefully in Calvary Cemetery. God knows who is in that grave in Macroom, it might even be an Egyptian.

Just a few more excerpts because, to me, these show the authenticity, the simplicity, the humility, the values of Judge William Mulligan.

Actually, most of us Friendly Sons are the sons and grandsons and the great-grandsons of Irish immigrants. Despite all the claims of royal Irish antecedents and the proud display of coats of arms, they came here as the impoverished victims of oppression or hunger. Whatever thirst they had, we have inherited with a vengeance. . . .

Whatever virtues we have we owe to our Irish forebears. I don't know much about my paternal antecedents except that my father, Michael Mulligan, was the son of Catherine Hughes, a first cousin of John Hughes our first Archbishop. I do have a family Bible which related that her brother, who was bashful and shy, left the farm and set forth on his own for America. His hand-written message in the

Hughes Bible says "Good bye, sister Kate, I am sick of farming, and being mechanically inclined. I am taking the tool kit and heading for Texas. Affectionately, your brother Howard." This message has been authenticated by a handwriting expert who says that it unquestionably is authentic—if not, he says it is an exquisite forgery. . . .

Gentlemen, although few of us were born in Ireland, most of us were all reared in a distinctly Irish tradition—it was marked by a fierce devotion to our faith. It was a demanding faith of fast and sacrifice and self-discipline. The tougher it was to follow, the easier it was for the Irish to pass down to their children. Now that its strictures have been somewhat relaxed, it will be so much more difficult to give and bequeath or even to inherit. But we will meet the challenge. We also inherit from our Irish forebears a fierce love of country—in peace or in war, particularly perhaps in war, we contributed much more than our share. But why shouldn't we love America? After all, we discovered it.

Judge Mulligan once said and I quote, "Every Irish American boy in the Bronx who did not have a vocation to become a priest or a policeman, aspired at least to become an usher at the Paradise."

Judge Mulligan talked a lot about that, about the wondrous stars and the ceiling of the Paradise. That was humorous, of course, but again it seems to me to say a great deal about the honesty and simplicity and, again, the authenticity of this man who—by way of Cathedral College, a school for those who might be thinking of entering into the priesthood and where he was but two years ahead of his friend whom he called Terry Cooke, later to be Cardinal-Archbishop of New York, and by way of Fordham University—became a legal scholar, a Federal Judge, a practicing lawyer with a huge law firm but never forgot who he was. This is why I have let Judge Mulligan speak for himself in his own words.

But indulge me for just a short time longer to permit me to reread a portion of today's Gospel. In my judgment, it described the life of Bill Mulligan with infinitely greater eloquence than even he could command, and, of even greater importance, reminds us, the living, of what our lives are supposed to be all about.

The King will say to those on his right, "Come and have my Father's blessing. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you the creation of the world for I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was naked and you clothed me; ill and you comforted me; imprisoned and you came to visit me."

Then the just will say, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You or see You thirsty and give You drink? When did we welcome You away from home or clothe You in your nakedness? When did we visit You when You were ill or imprisoned?"

The King will answer them, "I assure you as often you did it for one of My least brothers you did it for Me."

What Bill Mulligan did for the least of his brothers and sisters of Jesus is utterly beyond description. The newspapers are filled, as they should be, with factual data about his life. I need not recount that data. But no newspaper, no speech, no sermon could capture the essence of this man's charity, his generosity, his goodness, his kindness as does this gospel. He understood what this meant—that every human person is sacred, made in the image and likeness of Almighty God, that the poor we feed, the naked we clothe, the homeless we house, those who are thirsty to whom we give drink, those we visit in prison, the sick we console. Bill did so very much of that.

As the Archbishop of New York, I can tell you that neither I nor my predecessors ever asked Bill Mulligan's help for anything or for anyone that he was not there immediately, converting it into a privilege for himself because in anyone that we asked him to help he knew he was helping the Lord Jesus. And now he has given to the last full measure of his life.

Roseanna, William, Stephen, Ann, Mary Liz, I am very grateful to you for permitting me to celebrate this Mass, to reflect in there faltering words on Judge Mulligan. Your fidelity to the Judge has become a legend. Those of us who have seen it at work have been deeply moved and reminded of what it really means to love.

I made my last visit with Judge Mulligan in Lawrence Hospital after his stroke. This man who had been so articulate, so loquacious, so well-known for the gift that he brought to every public occasion, his golden tongue, this man that had been so powerful in so many ways, particularly as a Federal Judge, this man was now lying there utterly helpless. He could not speak, but he could acknowledge what I was saying to him. And I think he knew what I would say to him.

I said precisely:

Bill, our Divine Lord did not make possible the salvation of the world when He was strong and vigorous, when He was travelling the hills of Galilee, when He was preaching and teaching. No one was more eloquent than He. He did not make possible the salvation of the world in His spectacular miracles, giving sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf and raising the dead to life. He made possible the salvation of the world only when He was lying utterly helpless on the Cross, when nails were driven into His hands and into His feet, when the flesh had been ripped from His bones and His blood was pouring into the ground. The powerful Christ had become powerless in human terms, infinitely powerful in terms of His Father. It was in His suffering and death that He made possible the salvation of the world.

You, Bill Mulligan, with all the good that you have done, now in your powerlessness can be the most powerful man in this world because you can unite this powerlessness, this helplessness, this frustration with the powerlessness and the frustration of Christ on the Cross. Through you, untold wonders will be worked. Graces will

pour upon souls, souls you will never meet in this life, all over the world. A person in Kansas on the verge of suicide will be given the grace not to commit suicide because you have offered your helplessness. A person in sin will come out of sin because you have offered your helplessness. A person's loneliness will be filled. A mother will get her son back. These souls will be saved to the degree that you unite your helplessness with the helplessness with Christ on the Cross.

Oh, did he understand!

Let him have the last word.

The pendulum still swings, and I detect a growing recognition that the exercise of personal freedoms demands the correlative observance of personal responsibility, lest liberty become license.

We are a Government of Laws which recognizes that its function was never to create the rights we have as children of God but, rather, to protect and foster them. It was such a concept that nurtured our forebears and we, their descendants, must never forget that.

Jim Farley once said that the only time we stand together was at the Last Gospel. . . . It is good for us to stand together tonight on the eve of the feast of St. Patrick, to respond to the Toast to the United States which we, unabashedly, love and cherish, for what it has provided for us and others like us.

To the United States—God Bless [her].