
Laura Smith and the Smile of Faith

The Very Reverend Sam Candler
Sermon at the Funeral of Laura Maddox Smith
The Cathedral of St. Philip
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Each of you brings to this holy place your own remembrances of Laura Maddox Smith, and it is an honor for me to share my own remembrances with yours. In fact, her daughters, Laura and Florida, gave me this week a whole sheaf of papers—"nine pages worth!"—of special remembrances from her family, and special prayers that Laura kept in her farewell folder and in her prayer books. (Don't worry; I will not read them all, though they deserve to be heard.)

Today, we remember a lady who was magnificent, and generous, and faithful, in every way. If each of us were to close our eyes, right now, and remember Laura Smith, I daresay that one of the first things we would see, one of the first images to strike our souls, would be her smile. What a smile that is: beautiful, kind, graceful, confident, and generous.

That smile represented faithfulness in Laura. That smile carried faith. And it is the faith of Laura Smith that I want to remember today.

Laura Maddox Smith was a faithful woman, a faithful woman of God. She was faithful to people, for sure, but she was also faithful to institutions. That is a rare breed these days, someone who is faithful to institutions. She was magnificently loyal to this very place, the Cathedral of St. Philip. And it is hard to imagine this holy Cathedral without imagining also her presence, without remembering her smile on this church.

I know I appreciated her kindness, personally, to me; but I also know that she was kind to the Dean of the Cathedral, no matter who he might be! She was faithful that way. She gave faithfully to other fine institutions: the Episcopal Radio-TV Foundation, now the Alliance for Christian Media, to the Daughters of the King, to Meals on Wheels, A.G. Rhodes Home, the Red Cross, to more institutions than we can mention.

She was also faithful to institutions like the city of Atlanta and the state of Georgia. Daughter of an Atlanta mayor, she grew up on the very piece of land where the Governor's Mansion now stands. Woodhaven was the name of that grand home, and that property, now the Governor's Mansion, was the last place just visited in this earthly life. She left her own home and visited the Governor's Mansion on the Monday before she died.

She was even faithful to the National Cathedral of the Episcopal Church. She took exceptional pride—not sinful pride, for sure, but understandable pride—that she had actually preached at the National Cathedral. That place is all the better for it. Dean Collins reminded me a few minutes ago that Laura Smith was the first woman ever to preach from the pulpit of this Cathedral of St. Philip, too.

Laura Maddox Smith was faithful to family. She loved her beautiful daughters, Laura and Florida; and she loved their families. She was faithful to grand-children and great grand-children.

And she was certainly faithful to her dear husband, Ed. Florida and Laura spoke to me this week that there were two great

men in Laura's life""the Lord Jesus, and her husband Ed""but they admitted it was hard to say who came first! She is now in glory with them both.

When I first came to Atlanta ten years ago, Laura took my wife and me to the Piedmont Driving Club; and she insisted that we go in her car, the Jaguar. Well, that was fine and good. But at the end of the evening, she also insisted that I be the one to drive her car back home. I had never driven a Jaguar, and I was scared to death that I would wreck the thing. But Laura had faith, much more than I had; and we made it successfully.

Yes, ultimately, Laura Smith was faithful to God. She had faith in God, and I believe it was her faith in God that enabled her to have faith in so many others.

She had faith in her husband, her daughters, their husbands, her family, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She had faith in her church, in the great institutions of the world, in Atlanta, too, because she actually had faith in God first.

And I believe that faith is the ultimate reason for her smile. She smiled because she knew something real, something glorious, something graceful. It is God who loves and cares and saves each one of us. She smiled because she had faith in God.

And her smile continues. I do not speak of her smile in the past tense.

Two years ago, her family celebrated Laura's 90th birthday with a grand party. None of us will forget her beauty on that day, sitting on what looked to me like a throne at the front of the room. She was dressed, of course, in red""always red""and always smiling. I think that's where she is today, with her Lord Jesus, and sitting on a throne with all the angels of heaven. The angels are dressed in white, but I think she has her finest red dress on.

And she is smiling. That smile is what St. Paul would have called her spiritual body. That smile remains here, in our own remembrance of her; but that smile also resides in each of us she was faithful to. If Laura Smith ever smiled at any one of you today, then you, today, are carrying some of Laura's faith with you. Smile well. Smile at someone else today, and tomorrow, and the next day; and you will be able to transmit that same love, that same faith, of Laura Smith.

Today, Laura Maddox Smith is smiling gracefully. But our Lord Jesus Christ is smiling even more broadly. His smile says, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

AMEN.

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