

FATHERS' DAY



Along our drive home from Colorado, where we visited our daughter, son-in-law and fifteenth-month old grandson (cutest grandchild EVER!), my wife and I stopped in Enterprise, Oregon. We dined at Terminal Gravity Brew Pub, source of my favorite beer. My wife posted a Facebook photo of me in my “happy place.”

On the following day, during the final leg of our journey, I received a phone call. *The* phone call. My father had passed away. Though he turned 82 only five days earlier, I had expected dad to live another few years. I did not expect to receive this unexpected phone call.

Only two days earlier we were reveling in the sheer joy of an innocent child experiencing life for the first time – breadsticks, raspberries, the pool – and now I mourned the loss of a parent experiencing death (yes, for the first time). My wife drove the last 300 miles home, which allowed me to cry.

Christ came into this world as a child. Mary’s parents Joachim and Anne, if they were alive, undoubtedly thought that he was the cutest grandchild ever. Though a different life than our grandson’s, Jesus likely saw the world with innocent eyes and a joyous sense of possibilities. Perhaps it’s because of this innocence and joy – which adults often lose – that children are exceptionally important to Jesus, as we hear in the Gospels.

My father spent his last two decades with a loving wife. In their journey, he converted to Catholicism. Later, his mind began crumbling; once a Vice-President at Greyhound, he became less important in the corporate world as he became a vital member of the Christian community.

As Alzheimer’s first chipped away and then wielded a sledgehammer to both mind and body, his saintly wife never wavered in her love, her devotion and her care for dad. As my dad forgot his daily shave, as he donned six shirts if his wife forget to lay out his clothes, and, finally, as he became incontinent, many of us would have relied on a nursing home for support. Not Janet. She found that she had inner reserves to care for him. It’s what you do when you love your neighbor as you love yourself. And I am sure that dad felt that because when he was younger he consciously knew that his life revolved around Janet, and now as he grew older he instinctively knew that he could trust her.

Something woke my dad during the night. He rose, walked through the house, and fell, breaking his neck. Dad died within a few hours after the ambulance carried him to the hospital. Before he died, after a series of tests and when it was time for him to rest, Janet sang to him. If she moved away for an instant, he would call out for “Janet,” a name he had forgotten for many months until just a few days earlier. While Janet and the nurse prayed a decade of the rosary, dad passed away.

Dad spent his last 20 years in a happy place. And now with a mind like a child and an innocent temperament, he has entered into another happy place. It’s not the Terminal Gravity Brew Pub. It’s better; he is with God, reveling in the sheer joy of experiencing life-after-death for the first time.

R.I.P. Dad, I miss you.



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